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["I AM SO YOUNG AND FOOLISH," SHE WHISPERED; "CAN YOU REALLY LOVE ME?"]

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

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CHAPTER IV.

In the fair September sunshine the poor lonely waif—the sad, faded wreck of what had once been bright and lovely—reached the old court suburb of Kensington, and stood at the corner of a broad, imposing road near a mansion, whose iron gates were inscribed with the title "Connaught House."

Full many a time had the inhabitant of Caroline-street penetrated to this aristocratic neighbourhood. She looked strangely out of keeping with the wealth and magnificence around her; and yet once or twice in every quarter that slight bowed figure might have been seen so near the entrance to the fashionable school that her poor rusty clothes might almost have come in contact with the costly raiment of the young ladies as they passed out of the great gates for their daily walk.

Miss Daw knew their habits well, how in summer time the promenade was taken after tea, in winter between twelve and one, and how now in early autumn it followed directly after afternoon studies. She stood there waiting just as though she had expected to find a friend or loved one among Miss Frost's pupils. "She will know it, too," thought the poor creature; "she will be wearing black for him, and mourning him just as I do."

Miss Daw had not long to wait. She had hardly arrived ten minutes when the great gates opened and the troop of bright careless girls issued from them. Eagerly, anxiously did the solitary watcher scan each laughing face, and then a blank feeling of disappointment stole over her; *the* one she sought was not there, the girl to see whom she had traversed all those weary miles was not in that long procession.

She knew not what to do; she stood irresolute, her eyes still fixed upon the joyous throng, when a fragment of their conversation fell upon her ear.

"Nothing seems the same without Florence. I never thought we should miss her so," said a tall, gentle girl to her companion.

"She will come back, I think," returned the other. "I had a letter from her in the holidays, and she said she was miserable where she was."

Only those chance words, and yet they were destined to change the current of three lives!

Miss Daw never hesitated; she walked up the gravel path to the grand front entrance, knocked and requested the servant to let her see Miss Warburton.

"You can't," returned the maid, gruffly enough, "mistress would never let such as you come near the young ladies; besides, Miss Florence isn't here."

Miss Daw persisted.

"Will you give me her address?"

"I can't, I never heard it. She went off in a great hurry. I did hear as her pa died."

"Can I see your mistress?"

The servant hesitated and the matter was settled by the appearance of Miss Frost herself. She had been crossing the hall, and, struck by the unusual appearance of the visitor, came forward to learn her errand.

"You wished to see me?"

"If you please"—the voice was as gentle as refined, as the lady's own. "I have come a long way on purpose to see one of your pupils."

Perplexed the schoolmistress led the way to a little room which opened from the hall. She motioned her visitor to be seated, and taking a chair opposite her waited for her to speak; but the words were so long coming that she looked up in surprise, and saw the hot tears falling fast down the faded cheeks.

"I am afraid you are in trouble."

"Yes!" and the woman gulped back her sobs by a mighty effort; "but nothing can mend that! I came here to-night hoping to see one of your pupils. "Oh, lady"—and a piteous longing sounded in her voice—"let me see her! Your servant tells me she has gone, but you will give me her address, and let me see her sweet face again? It is the only remedy that can cure my pain?"

Miss Frost listened like a creature in a dream. The anguish of her visitor was too real—to genuine not to move her, and yet she felt there must be some mistake. This weary, faded creature could have nothing in common with the noble damsels entrusted to her care.

"You have not told me the young lady's name. Which of my pupils did you wish to see?"

"She was christened Florence—Florence Warburton!"

"Colonel Warburton's daughter left me the end of last term?"

"But you will tell me where she is?"

"I do not think I ought. Your interest in her cannot be very keen. She was under my care for over fifteen years, and this is the first time you have ever been here."

"Here, yes! But I have seen her! Oh, lady, I could not have lived without the sight. Every now and then I would get a longing on me to see my darling, and I would come over to Kensington just for the chance of watching for her walking with her companions. I came for that to-night, but she was not there!"

The other woman was touched in spite of herself.

"But what tie was there between you? Colonel Warburton himself told me he had no relation in the world but his two sisters."

"I was her nurse"—and the woman's voice trembled. "The first three years of her life Florence was like my own child. I taught her to walk. Mine was the first name she spoke, and I loved her—ah, lady, I can't tell you how—better than many mothers love their children!"

"I wonder the Colonel did not leave her with you when his wife died. She was full young for school."

A flush dyed the woman's cheek.

"I think I was too much mixed up with his wife in his mind. Mrs. Warburton had loved me dearly."

"I suppose she was a very beautiful woman. The Colonel never got over her loss!"

"She had a fair face, and the Colonel loved her well, I know, for I was with them all through their married life, and my heart yearns for their orphan child as though she were my own!"

Miss Frost hesitated.

"You seem in great poverty. Surely, Colonel Warburton did not forget so faithful a servant!"

"He offered me money—ay, many a time, but I was never one to live on charity! I prefer to work. It's not for what she can give me that I want Florence Warburton's address!"

It was so manifest that her object was sheer affection—nothing but a longing to see her nurseling again—that Miss Frost yielded. If the woman went to Doctors' Commons, and saw the Colonel's will, she would learn all she asked. There was was no object to be gained, therefore, in refusing her request.

"Miss Warburton is living with her aunt, Mrs. Fox. The family are now at their country seat, Foxgrove Court, county Blankshire."

Miss Daw trembled as she heard the name.

"I don't like Mrs. Fox," she said, simply. I never did."

"Neither do I, but the Colonel left his daughter to her care. I would gladly have kept the girl with me—I told her aunt so. I am a rich woman, and I loved Florence dearly. It would have been no hardship to me to provide for her!"

She never quite forgot how her strange visitor knelt at those words, and, taking her hand, kissed it passionately.

"Heaven bless you!" she murmured. Heaven bless you for your kindness to my darling!"

And then she rose to go. In vain Miss Frost proffered refreshments. She refused them all.

"It is getting late, and I must be back. I live by hard work, and I shall have to sit far into the night to make up for these stolen hours; only when I read Colonel Warburton's death in the papers I could not rest until I knew what had become of his daughter."

A strange impulse moved Miss Frost to say,—

"Leave me your address. I hear from Florence sometimes, and if anything of note happens to your nurseling I will let you know."

The woman accepted gratefully. She wrote her name and address upon a small slip of paper and handed it to the schoolmistress.

Miss Frost started. There were good writers in her school. A distinguished professor attended to instruct them, but never had she seen a clearer, more refined hand.

"She is a lady!" was her involuntary thought, as Miss Daw left the room. "She may have been nurse in Colonel Warburton's family. I can see she is desperately poor now, but, for all that, she is a gentlewoman. I could laugh at the idea, but her face seems quite familiar to me. I am almost certain I have seen her before. Perhaps it is only some passing resemblance, and she reminds me of someone I have known; but I wish I could recall whom! These half-and-half likenesses are so perplexing."

She tried to banish the subject from her thoughts. The girls came in, and she read prayers.

She presided later on at supper, and conversed cheerfully with the teachers, discussing the affairs of Connaught House with all her usual zeal and interest. Her energy never flagged, she gave no sign of being annoyed, and yet all the while one haunting doubt was troubling her—who was Miss Daw, and of whose face did her visitor's so strangely remind her?

It was only when she was alone in her own room, brushing out her still abundant hair, that she solved the question; and then for a moment the solution seemed more terrible than the doubt.

The face to which Miss Daw's bore such a similarity was Florence Warburton's own, allowing for the changes sorrow and trials had wrought in one; allowing, too, for the difference of age, the resemblance was something marvellous. They might have been mother and daughter.

"It is impossible!" she cried, speaking aloud in her dismay. "I must be mad! dreaming! Mrs. Warburton died before Florence came to me, and her husband mourned her for more than fifteen years. That she could be alive, that she could have sunk to such a depth of poverty as the poor creature who was here to-day, is beyond the wildest regions of imagination!"

But yet the resemblance haunted her. Those rare brown eyes, those sweet, expressive features, in each face they were the very same; only the one expression had the hopefulness of youth, the other the patient sadness of middle-age.

Miss Frost began to wonder whether the Colonel could have married beneath him, and his daughter's nurse have been a very near relation of his wife's.

She had not arrived at any satisfactory conclusion when she dropped asleep, and even in her slumber the subject haunted her. She seemed to see Florence's fair face lined and shadowed like Miss Daw's. She seemed to see the girl's rounded arm embracing that wasted form, and to hear her fresh, young voice call her "mother."

Taken altogether, Miss Frost had not much reason to congratulate herself on the humanity which had granted an audience to the supplicant; for, in spite of her best endeavours, Miss Daw's visit, and the motive of her strange interest in Florence Warburton, haunted the schoolmistress for many a long day. And yet, I think, she could not be blamed for her humanity. I believe, rather, that her charity was remembered by the recording angel, and noted in her favour.

CHAPTER V.

Florence Warburton felt as if this earth of ours had suddenly become heaven; she had forgotten her father's death—forgotten the slights and hardships which were her daily portion at Foxgrove Court. She remembered only that Alan was her life's love, and he was beside her telling her that for all time he wanted her companionship.

Lord Elsdale stroked the golden head caressingly with one hand, then he said gently,—

"I am waiting for my answer, Florence, child, do not keep me in suspense."

"Are you quite sure?" she whispered.

"Sure that I love you? Aye, better than aught on earth, my darling!"

"But——"

She hesitated, but he understood what she was thinking of.

"They have told you my story, dear; you have heard that five years ago I loved another. It is quite true, I cannot deny it; but, Florence, the past *is* past. Her treachery killed my love at one blow; my heart was fancy free before I met you, and you have made it all your own."

The girl raised her sweet eyes to his face.

"Do you know I thought you were going away, and that I should never see you again?"

"I shall never go unless you send me!"

"I am so young and foolish," she whispered. "Can you really love me?"

"Better than life itself!"

"Because," and the girl's voice had all the passion of a woman's, "I love you so, I think if you changed and grew tired of me, it would break my heart!"

"I shall never tire of you! And now, my sweet wild flower, tell me when shall I go to your uncle?"

"To my uncle?"

"Certainly. I must tell him that I have won the treasure he was incapable of appreciating. Florence, think of the long years between us; don't make me wait too long for my happiness, dear."

Enter Lady Emily; she was silent from sheer amazement. Florence, her own special *protégé*, in whose purity and discretion she believed so firmly, was sitting with her golden head upon Lord Elsdale's shoulder, his arm around her waist.

"Aunt Emily," and there was a joyous ring in the Earl's voice she had never heard since he possessed his title, "congratulate me; I have won my darling, and she has promised to be my own."

Lady Emily Fane was quite unable to answer him. Alan, the professed woman-hater, the morose bachelor, to win the pretty, fairy child she had designed for her own boy!

Florence put one hand on her friend's arm.

"Don't be angry," she said, pleadingly. "I know I am much too young and foolish for Lord Elsdale, but I love him, and I was not brave enough to refuse my happiness!"

Lady Emily relented at once. She took the girl into her own motherly arms and kissed her fondly.

"My darling!" she said, "you are fair and true enough to make anyone happy. I am very glad Alan is to have so sweet a wife, only you have both taken me unutterably by surprise."

"I don't know why!" said Lord Elsdale, a little testily. "I should have thought anyone would have guessed my secret long ago."

That night when Florence had retired, the aunt and nephew exchanged a few more serious words.

"And your heart is really in it, Alan?"

"Heart and soul, Aunt Emily. Can you doubt it—she is sweet enough to win any man's heart?"

"Ah! but she is so young and innocent. Forgive me, Alan, but she deserves to be a good man's first love."

The Earl froze at once.

"I may not be a good man; but I believe I can make Miss Warburton happy. *She* has no doubt of my affection."

"But *she* did not see your devotion to Lady Dane. Forgive me Alan, you know you are as dear to me almost as my Cecil. Can this pretty child really make up to you for the loss of your brilliant, beautiful betrothed?"

Alan caught her hand.

"So much so that I have felt actually grateful to the Viscountess for her rejection, since I learned to know my Florence."

"And you will go to Mr. Fox?"

"To-morrow."

"He will be very much surprised. I hope they won't be angry with the poor child."

"They won't dare to be angry with a future Countess. I suppose they are her only relations?"

"There is another aunt—a Miss Warburton."

"Ah! the Warburtons are a good old family. I don't think, however much I loved a woman, I could marry her unless she came of worthy parentage. I could not stand a tribe of poor relations claiming kindred with my wife."

"You have only the Fox family to fear, for Miss Warburton never goes anywhere."

"And the mother; are none of her family surviving?"

"I believe she was an only child. I have never heard much about her; but Cecil told me her loss wrecked her husband's life."

"I can believe that if she resembled her daughter."

Very early the next day the Earl of Elsdale arrived at the Court, and solicited an interview with its master.

He met Mr. Fox leisurely descending from his study—a room strangely misnamed, since its owner used it chiefly as a sanctum, wherein to enjoy cosy naps, undisturbed by intruders; but then, to be sure, trade does not engender a taste for literature and research.

"Ha! Lord Elsdale; you are an early bird. My wife and the girls are out shopping."

"I am not sorry to hear it, sir—if you will not think me ungallant—for my visit is to you."

He followed Mr. Fox into the study, took a chair opposite his host, and plunged at once into the object of his coming.

"I am here to ask you a favour, Mr. Fox. You do not know very much about me, and our acquaintance has been a short one; and yet you see I am bold enough not only to prefer my request, but to hope for a favourable reply."

"I am sure I will do my best to satisfy you, Lord Elsdale. I am always glad to oblige a neighbour. Is it the black breed of pigs you've taken a fancy to a couple of—or does your poultry woman want a sitting of my Cochin-China eggs—eh?"

He was a very simple-minded man; his wife was so undisputably mistress and master too, that she had quite usurped the headship of the family. It was only in such little matters as those he had mentioned that Mr. Fox felt himself to be of any authority.

"I want something infinitely more valuable than either of those," said Alan, gravely. "In fact, Mr. Fox, I have come here this morning to ask you for my wife."

"Your wife!"—Mr. Fox wiped his face—"but I didn't know you had one, my lord; and I am quite positive her ladyship is not here!"

Alan smiled, he really could not help it.

"No, she is not here. And, indeed, my wife does not exist at present; only the young lady who will, I hope, bear that title is at present under your protection, and so——"

"I see,"—much relieved—"you want to marry one of the girls. Why on earth didn't you say so at once? I hope it isn't Pussy; she's my favourite, and I want to keep her at home a bit longer."

Alan hastened to explain.

"I want to marry Miss Warburton. I have already spoken to her on the subject, and she has allowed me to come to you."

"And I am very glad to hear it!" said Mr. Fox, heartily. "I like the child immensely; but I shall be glad to see her in a home of her own. My wife puts upon her, you see, and I can't well interfere, seeing the girl's her own niece; but I often tell her it's hard lines to punish the girl for what's no fault of hers."

This speech sounded obscure; but Lord Elsdale construed it to allude to the poverty in which the Colonel's death had placed his child.

"You are her sole guardian, I think?"

"Yes. My brother-in-law, poor man, could never bear this country after his wife left him, and so before he went abroad he made a will, leaving the little girl to us."

Lord Elsdale wondered at the brief mention of the young wife.

"I suppose you knew Mrs. Warburton well?"

Mr. Fox looked ill at ease; he rubbed his face, twisted his fingers through his hair, and finally opened the window, on account of the heat.

"Yes, I knew her very well," he said, slowly; "and I always liked her."

"I ask, because it occurred to me there might be relations of hers living, to whom I ought to announce my engagement."

"I should think not," said Mr. Fox, decidedly; "she was the daughter of one of the Colonel's brother officers. I fancy the family went abroad."

Lord Elsdale began to talk of settlements, and to press his eager desire for an early wedding. Mr. Fox listened as a man bewildered.

"I'm very much obliged to you," he said, simply; "but I think you'd better talk to my wife, or the lawyers, about money matters. The child is not quite portionless, though Mrs. Fox always calls her a burden. The Colonel left her a nice little property, still it's a mere drop in the ocean to you. I won't deny it's a splendid match for Florence; but I hope, my lord, you'll be gentle and patient with her. She's a pretty creature, and it's not her fault."

What particular thing was not Florence's fault he never attempted to explain; he seemed unutterably relieved when he heard the sound of approaching wheels, and sending a servant to request his wife's presence, that lady presently appeared.

She showed no sign of surprise when she learned for what Lord Elsdale had come to the Court. She was a woman of the world, and she controlled her disappointment bravely; besides, until that impromptu dinner-party, her wildest hopes had never soared to the Earl as her son-in-law. It would be a great advantage to the girls to be first cousins to a countess, therefore she received the news with the utmost affability. Only on two points she was firm—the wedding could not be until December, and Florence must return at once to her uncle's house. Alan thought he had achieved a great deal, and, shaking hands with his relatives elect, rode swiftly towards Westfield to see his beautiful, childish *fiancée*.

Left alone, perfect silence reigned between husband and wife. She broke it,—

"Did you tell him?"

"No; I tried once or twice to begin, but I couldn't get it out. I thought, Janet, you would manage it so much better."

"I shall not manage it at all. He need never know. I was afraid at first you had been simpleton enough to tell him."

"I wish I had," groaned Mr. Fox; "for I am sure he ought to know. For the girl's sake the secret should not be kept from him."

"The girl can take tolerable care of herself, I expect, since she has managed to secure the best *parti* in the county. Once for all, Fox, I shan't tell him, and you mustn't either!"

"How would you like such a thing kept back from your own son Warburton?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"My mind is quite made up. Florence will be Countess of Elsdale, wealthy, courted, and admired; there is not the least occasion to trouble her or her husband with that dark story of the past."

And Mr. Fox, feeling himself vanquished in the battle, gave way, leaving his partner triumphant mistress of the field.

That very afternoon Lady Emily Fane received a visit from Mrs. Fox, and she hardly recognized that lady in her excessive amiability. Florence began to think her aunt had suddenly conceived a great affection for her, and marvelled at the change.

"But I must take the sweet child home with me," announced the mistress of the Court. "Lord Elsdale wishes to be married early in December, and two months is but a short time to prepare a trousseau worthy of a Countess."

There was no opposing her will, Florence's things were packed, and she took her place in the carriage at her aunt's side.

Very silent were the two ladies at first, only presently the girl said, softly,—

"I have plenty of clothes, Aunt Janet, Miss Frost always took care of that; and she bought me some new ones just before I came to you. I shan't want a trousseau."

"I shall give you the best trousseau money can provide," said Mrs. Fox. "No one shall say I let my brother's child go to her husband empty handed. We may not have got on very well hitherto, my dear, but I want your last weeks at the Court to be happy ones."

"You're to be a kind of brazen idol for us all to worship," whispered Pussy, wickedly, when Mrs. Fox had installed her niece in one of the state guest chambers, whither her belongings had already been removed. "You see you're almost a countess now. Well, I always liked you."

"You were always kind to me, Pussy."

"And are you happy?"

"Happier than I can say."

"I believe it," said Pussy, simply. "I thought at first it was the title and the luxuries, but I begin to understand now, Florence; it was just love."

"Just that!" whispered her cousin. "I love him as my own life. If he were a beggar I should feel just the same."

"Then I should feel very glad he was not a beggar. Well, dear, I hear you're to have a grand wedding—six bridesmaids, a huge wedding-cake, and all the proper etceteras."

"But I'm in mourning," urged Florence.

"Oh, you'll put that off for one day."

Then began a pleasant period of easeful happiness.

Lord Elsdale came to the Court nearly every day. Time only seemed to add to his devotion.

Mrs. Fox was the image of an affectionate, benevolent aunt, the girls all gracious cordiality.

Dressmakers and milliners gathered round the slight figure of the bride-elect. Whenever she was not with Alan it seemed to Florence she was being measured for some new garment, or some fresh one was being tried on.

"I believe Aunt Janet thinks we shall live in Siberia," she confided to Alan, "for I am sure she is getting me more clothes than I can wear out."

He smiled.

"So that I get you I don't mind the clothes."

"But I do. I seem to be nothing better than a lay figure for the maids to try dresses on."

He laughed outright.

"How do you know, little one, that I am not going to take you to the wilds of Africa, or

some other heathen place, where dressmakers are unknown? What should you say if I carried you away beyond the bounds of civilization, Floy?"

"I shouldn't mind if you went too."

"You may be pretty sure I shall go where you go, little lady. I don't mean to lose sight of you after the first of next month."

"And three months ago I had never seen you. Doesn't it seem wonderful, Alan?"

"It is not wonderful that any one should love you. When you are Lady Elsdale I shall have to shut you up in a glass case to prevent people losing their hearts in vain."

"I want no heart but yours, Alan.'

"And will you always think so, sweet?"

"Until I die."

"Do you know that I am a fearfully jealous nature, Florence? Nothing but your whole love would satisfy me."

"You have it all."

"Ay, do you know I am often selfish enough to be glad you have neither father, nor mother, brother, nor sister. You will be all mine, with no one to come between us."

"And I have been wishing so my mother had lived. I never wanted her so much as I have done lately."

"Don't grieve, dear. Believe me there are worse misfortunes than parents dead while true and honoured. One of my dearest friends loved a girl as true and innocent as you. Their wedding day was fixed, and he discovered that instead of being an orphan, her father was a convict in Australia."

"And surely that did not part them?"

"Surely it did. It could not have been otherwise, Floy. For the sake of his children a man must shrink from a wife whose antecedents are stained with crime."

"Poor girl,"—her eyes were full of tears—"I should have thought her husband would have loved her all the more."

"He was not her husband—he was spared that misery. The truth was discovered in time."

"I don't like him—he was hard and stern."

"Just and honourable."

"Would you do it?" she cried. "Would you give me up and take away your love for something that happened years before you knew me?"

"There is no question of that," he said, a little coldly. "You are the only child of an honourable man. There is no stain upon your parentage, my Florence."

In the dark aftertime the memory of that conversation came back to Florence over and over again. She seemed to see the proud, stern face, to hear the breath of coldness—the first she had ever heard from him—sounding in his voice.

It was a week before the wedding-day. Mrs. Fox called Florence into her own dressing-room.

"I want to speak to you, my dear; shut the door."

Miss Warburton obeyed, and then her aunt produced a jewel case, from which she took a necklace and bracelets of rare pearls. She clasped them silently on her niece's neck and arms.

"How beautiful! Are they really for me?"

"They have been yours for years, Florence. They were a wedding present to your mother."

"My mother!" A strange light flashed in the girl's eyes. "Oh, Aunt Janet! won't you, please, tell me something about her?"

"There is nothing to tell, child."

"Oh, surely there must be something—how she lived and how she died, how she spoke and how she looked. Fancy, aunt, I have never heard anything of my mother! I don't even know how we lost her."

Mrs. Fox devoutly hoped her ignorance might continue on that last subject.

"She was very pretty," she said, gravely. "I was struck when I saw you by your resemblance to her, only you are not half so beautiful. Your mother was like a lovely foreign bird—so bright and gay."

"And she loved me?" said Florence, softly.

"She loved you dearly. I had very little in common with your mother, Florence, but I know she loved you devotedly."

"And she died when I was three years old? Aunt Janet, where was she buried?"

Mrs. Fox stooped to unfasten the bracelets.

"I really do not know. After her loss your father could never bear her name mentioned."

"Then you were not with her?"

"I was abroad with my husband."

She rose and placed on the table a drawer full of trinkets and trifling ornaments.

"All these belonged to your mother, Florence. They were sent to me to keep for you."

There was a graceful confusion in the drawer sad to witness, when one knew the owner was dead and could never return to rectify it—lockets, brooches, chains, lace and ribbons, and in a piece of tissue paper a golden curl, labelled in a delicate hand "My baby's hair."

"Don't cry, child," said Mrs. Fox, noticing the girl's tears. "It's no use crying for what happened well nigh sixteen years before. What will the Earl say if he sees your eyes red?"

"He is not coming to-night. Aunt Janet, may I take these things away to my own room?"

"Yes, I meant you too. There was a locket with your father's likeness; I remember it was his wedding gift to his wife, but I cannot find it."

Florence went upstairs to dress for dinner. She was a person of consequence now, and one of the maids always came to assist her toilet. Mary, her first acquaintance, being specially deputed to this office.

The Earl was not coming to-night, so Florence cared little what she wore, and mourning afforded little variety. A velvet dress, with rare old lace at the neck and sleeves, was soon arranged. She sat down with a book waiting for the dinner bell, but to her surprise the maid lingered.

"Miss Florence."

"What is it, Mary," kindly, "is there anything the matter?"

"Nothing, miss, thank you, only there was a woman here to-day begged me to give you this note. She said she'd been to your old school to try to see you. She daren't come to the house, she said, 'cause of the mistress, but she'd give a great deal to see you."

Florence Warburton felt perplexed.

"I don't think I knew any one at school like that, Mary!"

"She is not a common person, miss—not a beggar, or anything of that sort. She's a lady I expect, though a poor one; and she seemed so set on seeing you I thought it could do no harm to take her letter. You're not vexed with me, Miss Florence?"

"Oh, no; I am sure you meant it kindly."

Left alone the girl drew her chair nearer the warm fire, and tore open the envelope Mary had given to her. The letter it enclosed was very short, and written in a clear, distinct hand, whose every character told Florence that her unknown correspondent was a lady.

"I have heard you are shortly to be married. As one who loved your parents dearly, who was with them throughout their married life, may I beg to see you? Your aunt and I are not friends, she was always jealous of me; she never loved me because I was so dear to others. I cannot come to Foxgrove Court and demand an interview with Miss Warburton; but to me Lord Elsdale's bride is not Miss Warburton at all, only the little toddling girl, whose first steps I guided, whose voice I taught to lisp her mother's name. If for the sake of that mother's memory my prayer is granted, I shall be found in the west arbour from eight to nine. I shall bring with me a token that I have not spoken falsely."

Florence never hesitated, any one who had known and loved her parents must be dear to her. She had the keenest longing to hear about these dear ones, and no one around her seemed either willing or able to answer her questions. Of course she would go and see her mother's friend.

There was no difficulty in accomplishing it; two of her cousins were from home, Pussy and her father never wanted other company while they had each other, and Mrs. Fox was engrossed in writing to her absent son. Directly she had finished her coffee Miss Warburton left the drawing-room, stole upstairs, wrapped herself in a warm fur cloak, and then went forward to the meeting that for all time was to influence her life.

There was a lovely moon; its soft rays shed a silver radiance around, and by their light Florence quickly found her way through the shrubbery to the distant arbour. She entered with eager anticipation, and then she felt warm, loving kisses on her face and clinging arms round her neck, as though of someone who loved her very dearly.

"I thought you would come," said a sweet, sad voice. "I believed your father's child would not refuse my prayer."

"And did you really know papa," asked Florence, "and my beautiful, angel mother?"

The arms which clasped the girl trembled, but the voice never faltered.

"I knew them both."

"And will you tell me about them? Fancy, I know nothing of my mother, except that she died when I was three years old."

"She was like you," said the voice, gently; "but, oh, child, may your lot be fairer!"

"Wasn't she happy?"

"She was happy as a poet's dream at first, your father loved her so; but she was young and foolish. There was a woman ever at hand to blame her slightest act, and instil the poison of jealousy into her husband's soul; and so, by the time her child was three years old, her life's happiness had ended."

"But my father loved her," said Florence, proudly; "he loved her as his very life."

"And she loved him. But, child, love isn't enough in this life; there must be faith, and trust, and forbearance, patience and gentleness too. Florence, when you are a wife will you have these?"

The girl trembled, there was no mistaking the earnestness of the question.

"I hope so, I pray so! Alan loves me, and I—I have no wish but to make him happy."

"Amen!" said the sweet, sad voice, gently. "If that be so your fate will indeed be fair."

"You said my aunt did not like you."

"She hates me!"

"Then I must not ask you to the house; but won't you tell me who you are, and why you love me so? I can feel your tears wet upon my face. You have come from London to see me, and yet I am a stranger to you."

"Not a stranger; you have slept in these arms; I have hushed you, soothed you, fondled you. Oh, my darling, don't call me a stranger!"

"And your name?"

"I cannot tell it to you." Then she unfastened something from her neck, and put it into the girl's hand—a gold chain supporting a locket of dead gold, with the monogram D.A.W. "Will you wear this for my sake, it was your mother's?"

She touched a spring and disclosed a likeness Florence recognized as her father's; he looked young and joyous there, not old and careworn, as in the portraits he sent to her at school. She gazed upon the face in perfect silence, then her visitor clasped the chain around her neck.

"You loved him dearly, I can see it! Love his memory always, and oh! think kindly of your mother, child—your mother who was so unhappy, and who loved you so."

"I think she was happier than my father," said Florence, simply. "He was left to mourn her—she was at rest."

"At rest!" cried the woman, passionately. "At rest! Oh, child, your words are a cruel mockery. There is such a thing as living death. You may die to the world, to those you loved, your home may be desolate and your child an orphan, and yet you yourself live despairingly on, weary and heart-broken—live

on because Heaven's laws have made it a sin to take the life which is such misery."

She had said too much if she wished to preserve her secret. Some strange instinct told Florence the truth; the girl sank upon her knees, and buried her face in the outcast's lap, sobbing out,—

"Mother! my mother, how could you go away? How could you let your child believe you dead?"

(To be continued.)

Wonderful Clock.—A new perpetual clock was put up recently at the Gare du Nord, Brussels, in such a position as to be fully exposed to the influences of the wind and weather, and though it has not since been touched, it has continued to keep good time. The weight is constantly wound up by a fan placed in the chimney. As soon as it approaches the extreme height of its course, it actuates a break, which stops the fan; and the greater the tendency of the fan to revolve, so much the more strongly does the break act to prevent it. A simple pawl arrangement prevents a down draught from exerting any effect. There is no necessity for a fire, as the natural draught of the chimney or pipe is sufficient; and if the clock is placed out-of-doors all that is required is to place it above a pipe sixteen or twenty feet high. The clock is made to run twenty-four hours after being wound up so as to provide for any temporary stoppage, but, by the addition of a wheel or two, it may be made to go for eight days after cessation of winding. The inventor, a native of Belgium, showed his original model at the Paris Exhibition in 1878, but he has since considerably improved upon it.

Amusing Picture Albums.—Fashion plates may be utilized in a very amusing way. Select suitable figures, cut them out, arrange them singly or in groups, with photograpic heads of friends or celebrated people where the head of the original was, and you have a most amusing page before you. If you possess some artistic skill, a bit of scenery may be sketched in with colour, shadows added, and the picture is complete. Some of the French plates are the most effective. A friend's face may be fitted into a becoming hat or bonnet, and the face coloured to make the whole complete. This is quickly done by mixing a little liquid gum with the colour, or putting it in, delicately tinting the cheeks brightly, while still wet. Sweet faces of old friends, frightful in the old-fashioned and ugly garments, are cleverly rejuvenated in these French toilets, and then rephotographed. The centre of a screen was cleverly arranged from these plates with photographic faces. It consisted of a group of friends, male and female, arranged as if sitting in an opera box, and was made with a gold background, which produced a very beautiful effect, as it throws up the bright colours of the dresses and resembles oiled panelling. Groups formed of children in the extravagant but picturesque costumes of those plates, but with the faces of the children of our love, are as if they had been touched with a magic wand, and turned into the queens and princes of fairy land. The diversion of arranging the groups and selecting the costumes from such an embarrassment of pretty things as the French plates offer, is thoroughly appreciated by an invalid or sick child, to whom amusement and occupation are of more worth than all the physic that Macbeth thought fit to only throw to dogs.

There is no real conflict between straightforwardness of character and the use of indirect methods. It is merely a question of the nearest and surest way to a given end. He who would avoid rushing upon obstacles, and so hindering the end in view, may be just as sincere and earnest, and a great deal wiser and more successful, than he who goes headlong, without perceiving the difficulties that lie across his path.

A TRIUMPH OF LOVE.

"You must go, Allie."

"But, mother—"

"But, my dear child, you need a holiday, and Lettie will expect you."

"How can I leave you, mother?"

And Allie Wentworth knelt down by her mother's easy-chair, and laid her head against the arm.

Mrs. Wentworth stroked the soft brown hair framing the delicate pale face, her eyes full of fondest love.

"Foolish child! Do you expect to be always so devoted to your old worn-out mother?" she said, a quiver in her voice.

"Yes, indeed I do; and you must not talk about being old and worn out. We will grow old together."

Her mother smiled.

"Well, but that need not prevent the holiday. Martha will take care of me. You must go, dear, I command you!"

"Then I must obey," said Allie, a bright smile flashing over her face.

She was not exactly a pretty girl, but one who would be attractive and lovable through age as well as youth, for the loveliness of her nature.

She had once cherished bright dreams of love and happy marriage, like other girls; but two years before her mother had been stricken down with paralysis, and for a long time they thought she would die.

Poor Allie! It was a dark time to her, for she was the only child of a widowed mother, and they had been devoted to each other.

She gave up her work, and for weeks lived right beside that sick-bed; but at last the doctors pronounced the dear invalid out of danger, and though she would never be well and strong again, the simple sparing of her life was enough to be for ever grateful for.

Henceforth Allie sternly banished romance from her mind, and went bravely and cheerfully back to the dress making shop; for though they had a small income, it was not sufficient for all their expenses.

Now, a letter from Lettie Harvey, an old school friend, had interrupted the sober routine of her life.

Lettie was going to be married, and urged her dear Allie to come to the wedding. She lived in a village not far from the city, and Allie did feel a wistful longing to escape for a short time to a freer atmosphere.

She would have put down the desire, and made her home duties an excuse for not accepting her friend's invitation; but her mother took the matter into her own hands, and sent her away.

Lettie was delighted to see her friend, and after telling her about her own love affair, said,—

"I sent for you, not only to see me married, Lettie, dear, but also to meet the nicest fellow in the world—next to Arthur."

"Nonsense, Lettie, you know that I do not care for such as that," said Allie, flushing.

"But you ought to. Do you intend to be an old maid?"

"Yes!" firmly and decidedly.

"Cross as two sticks—sour as a crab-apple! Oh, yes, I can see you now—a wrinkled, withered little witch, with a wisp of hair about as big as my finger, and shoulders bent almost double!"

Allie laughed, stole a glance at her slender, but straight, well rounded figure, her bright, soft eyes, and youthful face—then relapsed into gravity.

"I shall never marry, Lettie."

"Why not?" impatiently.

"Because I cannot desert my mother!"

"Nobody but a brute would ask you to do that!" exclaimed Lettie, indignantly. "I am sure Roy Stuart would not."

"Who?"

"Roy Stuart."

"Is that his name?"

"Yes. What do you think of it?"

"Altogether too romantic."

"Pshaw! It is a fine name, and just suits him. He is rather large, and dark, and handsome, I think, with beautiful grey eyes. Moreover, he is good and noble. He is Arthur's best friend; and just think how nice it would be to live here near together! I am sure this pure air would strengthen your mother."

"Do hush, Lettie! You talk as though I had nothing to do but signify my willingness, and the gentleman would propose," said Allie, rising and walking to the window, somewhat disturbed.

The bride-elect turned her engagement ring round on her pretty, plump finger, a half-smile on her face.

Her school-girl friendship had survived time and absence, and she felt an unselfish desire to see her friend as happy as she herself.

"She is a tender, loving creature. She would make an adorable wife and a devoted mother. She must get that foolish notion of self-sacrifice out of her head, or her life will be spoiled," mused the girl, silently.

Allie met Arthur Wootton, her friend's affianced, that evening; but not thus quietly was she destined to meet his friend.

The second day after her arrival she was persuaded to go out riding with Lettie. Now, she was not an experienced horsewoman, and unfortunately her horse had not been exercised for two or three days; and when beyond the limits of the village, he was disposed to take control.

"Pray be careful! I am afraid he will run away!" exclaimed Lettie, in alarm. "Dear me, if he should!"

"Don't mention it!" grasped Allie, growing pale, and pulling hard at the rein.

Well, he didn't exactly run away, but when they came near the banks of a river he bolted, and could not be pulled up until he stood in the middle of the ford.

His luckless rider did not stop then, for when he halted so suddenly and unexpectedly, she pitched headlong out of the saddle into the water.

It was not really a dangerous fall, but oh, how ridiculous and mortifying! There she sat in the middle of the stream, bare-headed and dripping wet, when a young man, attracted by Lettie's shrieks, hastened out of the woods, his gun in his hand.

Flinging down gun and game-bag, he waded in to the rescue of the unfortunate Allie.

"What an absurd mishap! Don't ask me to ever ride again," she said, shaking out her dripping habit.

"Thank Heaven, you are unhurt!" cried Lettie, gratefully. "And thank Roy for coming to the rescue," she added, with a flash of mischief in her eyes.

Allie glanced quickly up into the gery eyes she had heard called beautiful, then blushed deepest crimson.

That was how she met Mr. Stuart, and though she told herself it made no difference what kind of an impression she made on him; she could not think of her dishevelled, half-drowned appearance with anything but disgust.

"Gracious heavens, what a fright!" she murmured, when safe in her own room she went, girl-like, to the mirror the first thing.

Determined that the second impression should be better than the first, she made a careful toilet that evening, and appeared at her brightest and best.

Mr. Stuart, who proved to be an intelligent and agreeable as good looking, devoted himself to her entertainment in a quiet, unobtrusive way.

Lettie's wedding preparations went merrily on, and the bridegroom's best friend seemed to be deeply interested in them. He certainly called on the Harveys as often as he could, and never failed to seek out Allie.

As time passed she grew almost frightened at herself, she felt so changed, so unlike the sober-minded, resolute girl of former days.

"I am losing all the practical common-sense I have gained in two years, and going back to

the romantic dreams of younger days. I must stop. I must go home," she thought, with a troubled sigh.

But Lettie married, and went away on a short tour, and still she lingered, for she could not get away from the urgent entreaties of the family to stay and help arrange Lettie and Arthur's house, and her mother wrote for her to prolong her visit.

Half laughing, half vexed, she consented.

"It seems as if the whole world has conspired against me, mother included. What would she say if she knew? But I will not be a coward and run away!" blushing furiously.

It was exciting, delightful employment furnishing a house. Sometimes she would make believe it was her own, and many sweet thoughts flitted through her mind while she helped to arrange the pretty rooms.

Mr. Stuart did his share of the work, too, and once she stood at the front door and waited for him, a bright, welcoming smile on her lips.

He sprang up the steps, and catching her hand, kissed it warmly.

"I could almost imagine this home, and you——"

But snatching her hand away, she hastily retreated to the little kitchen, where Lettie's younger sisters were putting away dishes and pots and pans.

At last it was all ready for habitation, and they went through the house a merry inspecting-party, late one afternoon, but when they reached the parlour, the younger people went on out into the garden, leaving Roy and Allie alone.

A small fire had been kindled in the grate, for it was September, and frosty, and the girl sat down before it to warm her hands. She looked rather pale and fagged out, not from physical labour, but mental unrest.

Roy stood on the hearthrug near her, and when she started up, unable to endure his earnest, steadfast look any longer, he gently detained her.

"Your work and mine has been finished here, but must we part? Will you not help me arrange a home, and then be its dear mistress? Will you not marry me. Allie—be my dear, honoured wife? I love you so truly, darling!"

"You have learned the lesson quickly," she said, striving hard to keep cool and composed.

"But none the less surely. My dearest, you will say yes?"

"No, no!" she cried, sharply, finding it terribly hard to resist his tenderness. "I have resolved never to marry. My mother is an invalid. She needs me, and my duty is to remain with her."

"Yes, I know all your trials. I only ask to share your duties, not to take you from them. Your mother shall be my mother, and together we will take care of her. I am a lonely fellow, Allie. I have no mother."

"No, I will not be tempted. You would feel burdened after awhile, and wish that you had been less rash."

He drew back, a change passing over his face.

"Do you really think that? Is that your opinion of me?"

"Yes."

"Then I will not trouble you any longer!"

And before she could make any reply, he had left the room, and the house.

A moment of breathless silence, and then she called to him to come back—that she had overrated her own strength—she could not make the sacrifice. But he did not hear, and only the children rushed in to tell her it was time to go home.

The next day she returned home, and to work; but not much satisfaction did she feel, and none at all when her mother, in one of their long confidential talks, told her it was her dearest wish to see her married.

Allie never breathed a word about her brief romance, but she laid her head down on her mother's knee, with a long, quivering sigh.

When she returned home from work, one evening, a few weeks later, her mother innocently crushed the last lingering hope she might have cherished, by telling her that a gentleman had called to see her.

"A Mr. Roy Stuart, from Australia. He called to bid you good-bye before starting to Australia."

"To Australia? Then I shall never see him again," she thought, pale and faint with bitter disappointment.

After that she settled down in earnest; and when, a year from the date of her marriage, Lettie wrote, urging her to take another holiday, she consented, knowing that to keep up her strength she must rest occasionally.

Her happy friend had a thousand things to tell, but not once did she mention Roy Stuart's name, and Allie could not question her.

In the evening she went into the parlour and sat down, as on that other evening when she had so rashly thrown her happiness away. She looked into the fire, so busy with bitter-sweet memories she did not hear the door open, or turn to see who entered, until a well-remembered voice said,—

"Good-evening, Mrs. Wootton, Arthur——'

She sprang up, then, with a joyful cry.

"Mr. Stuart! Is it possible?"

Then they stood, hand clasping hand, looking at each other with silent lips, but eloquent eyes.

"I though you were in Australia," said Allie at last, her glance falling.

"No; I returned a few days ago. Can it be true you are glad to see me?"

"Is it hard to realize?" she said, in a low—very low—tone, her cheeks deeply flushed.

"Oh, yes, very hard, after your unkind treatment the last time we were together in this room."

"Did I behave badly?"

"Yes, cruelly."

"And is it too late to make amends?"

Her eyes were sparkling, and a demure little smile played round her lips.

"Not if you——. Allie, you are not trifling with me?"

"Do I look like it? Ah! Roy, I have been *miserable!*" she cried, tears rushing to her eyes.

"And so have I, my darling!" he said, drawing her near to him.

"It was all a mistake. I could not be strong-minded, and sacrifice myself; and then—and then, it was not desired. If you had not been so hasty——"

"And if you had not been so distrustful. Dear wife of mine, kiss me, for forgiveness, for joy, and then for a pledge of future peace. That dream home seems very near to-night."

It soon became a reality, and no one felt so sincerely and unselfishly pleased as the invalid mother, who soon found that she had gained a son instead of losing a daughter.

Lettie was triumphant.

M. G.

The Duke of Edinburgh is having constructed at Eastwell a large and commodious dairy. It is built of wood from the Prince of Wales's estate at Sandringham, and is, as a plan, quite unique for this country. It is to be fitted up in an elaborate manner, with introductions from Russia and other countries. Since his residence at Eastwell his Royal Highness has taken great interest in farming matters, and has, it is stated, several prize animals which will be exhibited at the forthcoming cattle shows.

In celebration of the "golden wedding" of Sir John Heron Maxwell and Lady Heron Maxwell, of Springkell, the tenantry on their Dumfriesshire estates have forwarded them an address expressive of esteem and good wishes. The tenantry have also resolved to present Sir John with his portrait in oil. The funds have been already subscribed, and the work has been entrusted to Mr. W. C. Lockhart, of the Royal Scottish Academy.

WHERE GRANDMOTHER SAT IN THE CORNER.

The face was all wrinkled, but smiling,
And fair as the fairest can be,
While each peaceful look was beguiling,
When grandmother's eyes fell on me;
And, oh! with what love and devotion
I turned to that spot, long so dear,
Where grandmother sat in the corner,
With ever a word of good cheer.

The face was all wrinkled, but smiling,
With never a shadow of care,
Where grandmother sat in the corner,
While patience and hope lingered there.

Those wrinkles were growing in beauty,
The heart overflowing with love,
As her feeble footsteps were nearing
That rest with her dear ones above.
And, oh! with what tender emotion
She spoke of the parting so near,
While grandmother sat in the corner,
With face like the sunshine so clear.

That dear face has left us for ever,
Her smiles we shall never more see;
The hands, once so busy, are pulseless,
The heart hath no love-throbs for me.
But, oh! in the home of my childhood
One spot ever cherished shall be—
Where grandmother sat in the corner,
With eyes full of love-light for me.

D. C. M.

MADE FOR EACH OTHER.

CHAPTER V.

ALMOST GONE.

Sidney and Ruth walked along for a short distance in silence, both of them feeling rather awkward at thus being thrown together.

A damp, chilly mist had risen, and though it was not yet six o'clock, the evening was darker than it often is at midnight.

"You had better take my arm," said Stanhope, when he observed that Ruth stumbled over a rough piece of ground.

But even as he spoke he likewise tripped, and the girl laughed, as she asked saucily,—

"Won't it be the blind leading the blind?"

"It certainly seems very like it," he replied, in an amused tone; "for they are by no means liberal with their gas in this place."

She made some reply to the effect that they were not liberal with anything in Weekwich; but she took his arm, and together they found the road much less difficult.

But as they walked along side by side they both of them felt that it was passing strange that they should thus be linked arm-in-arm like friends or even lovers.

They did not put their thoughts into words, however, and probably silence was more eloquent than speech, for when they reached Wrayford Hall, and the astonished Brown had opened the door, Ruth said quietly, and as a matter of course,—

"You will come in and speak to my aunt, Mr. Stanhope?"

"Thank you, I——" he began, as though he would excuse himself, but she had entered the house, taking his assent for granted, and he had no choice but to follow her.

Miss Wrayford had declared that nothing Ruth could do would surprise her; but she was a little astonished when she recognised her niece's companion.

She received him very cordially, however, and she suggested that he should take off his overcoat, as otherwise he would not feel the benefit of it on going out into the cold, and as tea had been kept waiting for Ruth he was invited to take a cup.

"And how is Edith?" asked Miss Wrayford

of Ruth as the latter was silently drinking her tea.

"She says there is nothing the matter with her," was the reply; "but I thought her very unwell, indeed. Don't you think she ought to see a doctor, Mr. Stanhope?"

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose she ought," was the reply.

In truth, however, his thoughts were with Ruth rather than with Edith, and he was thinking how handsome the girl before him was looking, and how exquisitely the olive-green dress she wore suited her brilliant complexion.

The room, too, in which they were seated was very unlike Mrs. Moulton's small, though pretty drawing-room.

Here everything was large and lofty, brilliant with gold and glass and gorgeous colour, and he felt a strange reluctance to leave this bright room and its two fair occupants to return to his own solitary and cheerless home.

Brown had removed the tea-table, and the small party gathered nearer the fire.

"I suppose you will be having your house refurnished and decorated soon?" remarked Miss Wrayford, casually.

"Yes," assented Stanhope; "it is comfortless enough now, I assure you."

"Then why don't you begin at once?" asked Ruth, with her usual directness. "I only wish this place wanted refurnishing," she added, with a glance about her. "There is nothing I should delight in more than selecting and arranging things. Indeed, when I come of age I mean to make a change. I will have one suite of rooms fitted up with washed-out blues and yellow-greens, and rush-bottom chairs, and peacock's feathers and sunflowers; everything here is so glaring."

"I am not æsthetic, and I confess I prefer this style of furnishing," replied Stanhope. "I like things about me to be bright and cheerful even at the risk of their being considered glaring; but I am really waiting until I can have the assistance and taste of a lady in fitting up my house."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Ruth, quickly; then after a slight pause she added, "I have no doubt Edith will take a great deal of pleasure in arranging it all."

It was the first time she had pointedly alluded to his engagement, and he felt himself flush as he answered,—

"I suppose she will if it doesn't bore her too much."

"Edith never used to complain of being bored," remarked Miss Wrayford, in a tone that might almost have been taken for reproof. "She was a very sweet-tempered girl until—until she was taken ill in the summer."

"I never heard of this illness," said Stanhope, questioningly.

"Oh, I don't think it was very serious," replied Miss Wrayford, hastily. "She was laid up for a few days, and her mother took her to the seaside; but she hasn't seemed quite the same since, though I daresay she will be all right again soon."

Then Miss Wrayford began to talk about other things, and soon after this Sidney Stanhope went away.

He felt reluctant to go, but dinner-time was approaching, and to stay much longer would be like seeming to ask for an invitation, so he walked home through the cold mist, feeling as though he had left all comfort and cheerfulness behind him.

There was no club in Westwich where men of his class could meet together, and as yet he had made but few acquaintances; while his engagement to Edith Moulton took him out of the list of eligible bachelors, and practically prevented him from being sought after and made welcome by the parents of marriageable daughters.

The Moultons also were not exactly in the best set in the county, so that he had made no friends through them, and but few people of any standing had either left or sent cards to Stanhope House.

So Sidney was solitary and isolated, and he thought longingly of his comfortable chambers in London, of his club, and of the men he would be sure to meet there, and he felt that he would gladly give more than a trifle to be able to walk into the Delphic and order a dinner as of old.

The sight of his own blazing fire, however, cheered him a little, and when dinner was served he found that his housekeeper had been more successful than previously, so things were not so bad as they might have been.

But ever and again, as he sat over his cigar and magazines that evening, the memory of Ruth Wrayford's face came back to him.

"She is the kind of girl that I greatly dislike," he had said and thought, and he was now by no means reconciled to the style of woman of which she was the type; but for all that he could not help thinking how lovely she looked in her olive-green velvet and ornaments of gold; and in his own mind he pictured her as presiding at his table, receiving his guests, and pervading his house with the sweetness of her presence.

"The home will always be a bright and a happy one where she is mistress," he thought, with something like a sigh; "for even if she were ill she would bear the affliction cheerfully, not considering it necessary to make other people miserable because she was suffering."

Then his mind recurred to the woman whom he had asked to be his wife, and his heart sank like lead in his breast as he remembered her peevish fretfulness, and her selfish disregard of the comfort of others.

"A nice prospect for the future," he muttered, bitterly; "but it's too late to repent. I wonder, if there was any truth in what those two women were saying last night. It was certainly very odd for Mrs. Moulton to send to inquire after him. One would think he was a very old friend, indeed, or that they were greatly interested in his condition. I think Coniston was unnecessarily anxious about his niece, however; I don't fancy she is at all desirous of marrying the fellow. I believe I should have a better chance with her myself if I were free."

So he mused, while the wind moaned and shrieked round the old house, and the fire burned with that peculiarly clear and bluish light indicative of frosty weather.

The next morning he was up betimes and out skating.

There is nothing like bodily exercise for dissipating the blues; so after spending a couple of hours on the ice he came home, ate a hearty breakfast, and was off again.

He went to skate on the river this time, and here he met Ruth, who greeted him brightly as she said,—

"My uncle has been croaking as usual. He says the thermometer has gone up I don't know how many degrees, and that the ice isn't safe, and that I shall be drowned to a dead certainty. He is a veritable prophet of evil, as though any ice could melt in such a wind as this!"

"Still I observed that the ice is weak in some places," replied Stanhope, carelessly. "I don't think I should care to go on the Burr Pool, for I am told there are some deep holes in it; but here it doesn't matter much, for the river is shallow."

"It's deep enough to drown a taller man than you, sir," here interposed an old gentleman, who was close by them, though he stood on the bank; "and there is a strong current, too, which always makes the ice here more or less unsafe."

"Well, we can but die once," retorted Ruth, with a light, joyous laugh, and she went off, seeming like a bird to skim the surface of the ice.

Stanhope did not follow her, though he watched her graceful figure with only too evident admiration, for he was becoming dimly conscious that this girl, with all her faults, might exercise a powerful fascination upon him; and he felt that it would not be fair to her nor to himself to make her conspicuous by any marked attention on his part while he was engaged to somebody else.

The scene upon which he looked was picturesque and brilliant, for the sun was shining as though it had been May instead of December, and the ice glistened like glass, though in many places it gave very decided symptoms of melting.

Though the river was comparatively narrow in this part there were a great number of well-dressed people upon it, darting here and there like so many children at play.

Suddenly, as Stanhope thus gazed, he heard a cracking sound, followed by a wild shriek from many voices, and the next instant he, with dozens of others, found themselves in the water, with sheets of broken ice about them.

To clutch hold of one of these pieces and try to keep afloat was what each individual tried to do; but it was not an easy matter, and, as usually happens on such occasions, there was no one at hand to render assistance.

Sidney Stanhope could swim, but this availed him little now, when, disregarding his own danger, he was trying to make his way to where Ruth Wrayford could be seen clinging to a block of ice.

The face of the wilful heiress was very pale; she did not think lightly of death now she was brought face to face with the King of Terrors, but she did not scream as those about her were doing, neither did she lose her presence of mind and struggle, but she clung desperately to the ice, that enabled her to keep her head and shoulders afloat, and she looked about anxiously for help.

She saw Stanhope trying to make his way towards her, but he was weighted with his skates, and progress was not easy by reason of the ice and the people in the way.

Some of these people clutched at him; they all wanted to save themselves heedless for the moment as to what became of others, and their shrieks and entreaties for help were heart-rending.

Ruth knew that Stanhope was trying to reach her side to save her, but she felt that she could not keep afloat much longer; the heavy cloth dress she wore had become saturated with water and seemed to be dragging her down, while her hands were numbed with the cruel cold, and she seemed to have lost all feeling in them.

With despairing eyes she watched Stanhope as he came so slowly towards her.

"He will be too late," she moaned, "for I cannot hold on longer."

Then she turned her eyes for one last look upon earth and sky.

The river banks were familiar to her, even in their present wintry garb, and the leafless trees looked like weird skeletons bending over to watch her die.

In the sky the sun shone with undimmed splendour, as though in mockery of her agony; and the cry of some of her companions in peril, and the gurgling sound which followed as they sank under the pitiless water, all seemed to drag her down to her fate.

"Hold on, for a few seconds more!" shouted Stanhope, who caught sight of her face and saw that she was going.

But the injunction came too late, the ice to which she had held on so long slipped from her grasp, and with something like a sob she sank to the bottom of the river.

Nerved by the sight, he dived after her and brought her to the surface, but his own strength was failing, and he called feebly for help while he supported his unconscious burden.

Only a few vigorous strokes from his usually powerful arm would have taken them to the bank of the stream, but at this supreme moment his limbs failed him, and clasping the girl to his heart whom he now knew was dearer to him than life itself, he gave up the struggle for both of them.

A few minutes' later the help that had seemed so tardy in arriving came, and these two, having been anxiously watched by many standing on the banks of the river, were quickly pulled out of the water, and every means were taken to restore animation.

With Stanhope this was not a very difficult matter; but Ruth, though still living, was

breathless and motionless, and there was no doctor upon the spot.

On recovering Stanhope's first question was naturally for her, and on hearing that she was in the same house as himself, which happened to be nearest the spot when they were dragged from the river, he insisted at once on being taken to her.

"I know something about such matters," he said, decisively, as he went to the side of the seemingly lifeless girl.

Never had Ruth looked more lovely than she looked now, as she lay here silent and motionless with all the calm repose yet without the rigidity of death.

For a second or two he examined her, and a feeling of despair came upon him, for he could not detect one sign of life.

Suddenly, however, his face changed, hope sprang up in his heart, and he exclaimed, breathlessly,—

"She is not dead," and he set to work to try to inflate the lungs that seemed at the time to have finished their work.

He succeeds.

The breath comes naturally at last.

There, is a sob, then a shudder, followed by a low moan of pain, and he pauses joyfully from his work, for he knows that she will live.

"It's you who've saved her, sir," said one of the women who had first attended to the girl; "I thought she was quite gone, and I shouldn't have tried any more."

"She will never but once be nearer death than she was then," replied Stanhope, with a feeling of gratitude to Heaven which words could not express; "but she will live now, and I will send for her aunt to take care of her."

But Miss Wrayford was already at the door. She had heard of the accident, and was told where Ruth had been taken.

On arriving at the house, however, the people told her that the young lady was beyond all help, and she was overwhelmed with despair when Stanhope met her with the assurance that Ruth would live.

Then he hastened home to change his wet clothing for more comfortable attire, for in his anxiety about Ruth he would not wait to take care of himself, and now he was rather anxious as to consequences.

He would have been not a little surprised if he had known that the story was already circulated about Westwich that he and Ruth Wrayford had been drowned together.

The report reached Edith Moulton, and acted like a charm upon her, for she believed that the same stroke of fate had made her free and had swept away her rival.

Her exultation lasted but a short time, for the true version of the story quickly reached her, but its beneficial effects remained; and when Stanhope called to see her the next day, he found her capricious and bad-tempered, but, to all appearance, quite restored to health.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PARTY—AND AFTER

Happily few lives—and those few strangers to the neighbourhood—were lost in the accident that had so nearly proved fatal to Ruth Wrayford, and she soon recovered from the shock which her nervous system had sustained.

Sidney Stanhope was not quite so fortunate, for he had remained a long time in his wet clothing, and had caught a chill which the doctor who had attended him at one time feared might prove serious.

The danger passed off, and the young man was able to get about again; but a strange apathy had come over him, and he seemed to take so little interest in life that Mr. Coniston, who went to see him, felt not a little puzzled as o the cause.

"You seem unnerved and unstrung," observed Ruth's uncle, after he had talked with him a little while; "I should take a ran up to town if I were you, or go over to Paris for a week or two. You are getting moped to death in this place."

"It is dull," he replied, wearily; "but I don't care to go away at this time of the year; and there is no place that I particularly wish to see."

"You received my note?" asked Coniston, finding the young man was not in a talkative humour.

"Yes, and I was going to reply to it, as I felt stronger. The arrangement you suggest about the property will suit me very well, and the lawyers can settle the matter as soon as you like. By the way, how is Miss Ruth?"

"Her health is all right, and she and her aunt charged me with all kinds of messages to you; but she is dull and quiet, which is such an unnatural condition for her to be in, that I am rather alarmed about it."

"Perhaps she is meditating an elopement with the gentleman of whom you disapprove," suggested Stanhope, with a faint smile.

"No, there is nothing of that; and I think I must rather have exaggerated the danger from the first, for the fellow called yesterday and she wouldn't see him, so there doesn't seem much danger of an elopement. Indeed, I am beginning to think that Ruth's worst faults are upon the surface; she is really a very generous-hearted, noble-minded girl."

Stanhope smiled, remembering the very different tone the young lady's guardian had used such a short time before, and he waited patiently to hear the cause of the change.

"You know, I suppose," said Coniston, with some awkwardness, "that Dora Wrayford and I are going to be married?"

"No. How should I know it?" asked Stanhope in genuine surprise. "When is it to be?"

"Soon, I hope," was the answer. "I've been in love with Dora for many years," he went on; "and she hasn't been easy to win, but she has consented at last; and Ruth guessed the state of affairs, and joined me in thinking I had waited long enough, and she volunteered to promise to be on her best behaviour if we would get married at once, and make the Hall our home till she comes of age."

"Or until she gets married," suggested Stanhope.

"That is just what I said," assented Coniston; "but she vows she shall never marry. That of course, is ridiculous; but provided she marries a man who is worthy of her, I don't care how soon it takes place, for, of course, she is a serious responsibility."

Stanhope smiled, as he responded almost sadly,—

"A responsibility of which many would be glad to relieve you, I don't doubt. But now I think of it I may as well ask, does Miss Ruth still propose to give her party on the day previously arranged?"

"Yes, and I was particularly charged to tell you that we hope you will come. It is to be something more than a girl's party, for some friends of mine and of Dora's will be present."

"Oh, I shall certainly come if I am well enough," was the answer; "and then I think I shall follow your advice, and run to town for a day or two. This place is fearfully slow."

Then they talked about other matters until Coniston went away, and Stanhope was left to think over what he had heard.

"So those two middle-aged people are going to be married," he mused—"a love-match, too, at their time of life—and *I*——"

The prospect before himself was so unpleasing that he started up impatiently and tried to divert the current of his thoughts into a more cheerful channel.

But this was no easy matter.

He was not satisfied with Edith, and he reflected somewhat bitterly that, if she could read his heart she would have good reason to be dissatisfied with him, for he repented his hasty engagement; and he recognized the fact that if he had not felt so mortified with Ruth he would never have entered into it.

For he had come to Westwich with the full intention of marrying Ruth Wrayford; and, with pardonable egotism after what had been said to him by her uncle, he thought she was only waiting to be won.

His irritation, therefore, was in proportion to his previous confidence, and his reception by the Moultons had soothed his wounded pride, while it made him half believe that he was in love with Edith.

Thus ties are forged that mar men's lives, and though he now dreaded having to fulfil his engagement he saw no honourable way of getting out of it.

Mrs. Moulton had sent to inquire for him, and Edith had written him a pretty little note, but there was no heart in the effusion; and he could almost believe that the mother had dictated it, so unlike was it to the girl's usual manner of expression.

He saw but little of Edith before the night of Ruth's party, and he declined Mrs. Moulton's offer of a seat in the brougham she would hire for the evening.

"Thank you, I have ordered a carriage for myself," he replied, carelessly, and then he began to talk about running up to town for a little while.

As he thus talked Edith's mother listened to him in dismay. She knew that her daughter had met Arthur Ransom more than once during the past ten days, and she was hourly expecting some scandal to arise out of it.

Talking to the girl had been quite useless, and now the mother's only hope was in a speedy marriage, so that an insuperable bar might be raised between the adventurer and her child.

At length she could listen no longer to his plans, which, if carried out, would dash her hopes to the ground, and she said, in a tone of displeasure,—

"Going away! I thought you and Edith were going to be married almost immediately!"

"We are neither of us in any hurry," he replied, with affected carelessness; "are we, Edith?"

"I am not," she replied, with a toss of the head. "I don't care how long it is put off. I do wish, ma, you would leave us to manage our own affairs."

Mrs. Moulton made no reply. She could not say what was in her mind, so she would say nothing at all.

The night of the party came, and Ruth, attired in white silk and blush roses, with strings of costly pearls round her throat and wrists, stood waiting to receive her guests.

Stanhope had only seen her for a second or two since the morning of the accident upon the river, and he could not now help observing that a change had come over her.

She seemed more womanly, but she was none the less beautiful, and she blushed a rosy red as he came forward and took her hand.

The colour had not left her cheeks when Mr. Ransom was announced; and the latter not only shook hands with his fair hostess, but took a place by her side, as though he had a right to be near her and support her by his presence.

Ruth did not observe this at first, but when she did so she expostulated with him, and while she was speaking Mrs. and Miss Moulton arrived.

Edith flashed a glance upon the couple that, in its swift anger and burning jealousy, frightened her mother, who, happily was the only one to observe it; and she stepped forward and began to compliment Ruth upon looking so well, hoping that by so doing she would give her daughter time to recover herself.

Her purpose was gained so far that Edith attached herself to Ransom and made him feel the imminence of a scene if he did not soothe and try to please her.

"She will do something to make Sidney break off the engagement, and he will be nothing loth, I fear," thought Mrs. Moulton, with a sigh; and as she looked about in search of the man to whom her daughter was engaged she observed that his eyes were fixed upon Ruth, and she seemed to read his secret as though it had been written in legible characters upon his face.

Then she looked about for Edith, and found her in the ball-room clasped in Ransom's arms,

and whirling round to the mad music of a popular waltz.

"I will put an end to this kind of thing to-morrow," she thought, resolutely. "After his promise to me I think his conduct is disgraceful, and as for Edith——"

She closed her lips tightly; it took a good deal to rouse Mrs. Moulton, but she could be very decisive and even severe if she were driven to it.

The party was a great success, if one might judge by the manner in which the younger portion of the guests danced, and the elder ones played cards, talked scandal, and did justice to the sumptuous supper provided for them.

Indeed, Mrs. Moulton herself was not proof against a rubber of whist, and thus she lost sight of her daughter, whose flushed cheeks, unnaturally brilliant eyes, and general behaviour were making her an object of curiosity, if not of interest.

Exacting as Edith was, however, she could not chain Ransom to her side, for he had made up his mind to press Ruth to accept him this evening, and he would allow no consideration for Edith to stand in his way.

He had watched Stanhope as he danced with Ruth, and he felt a vague uneasiness as he did so, for he felt sure that if the young man had not been engaged to Edith he would have been a very formidable rival for the favour of the heiress.

"And nothing is more brittle than an engagement to marry," he thought, cynically. "In her present frame of mind Edith is sure to give him an opportunity of breaking it, and he may be only too glad of the excuse. I must get my answer to-night, whatever it is."

So he watched his opportunity, and late in the evening he got Ruth to dance with him; and then, under the plea that the rooms were hot, he led her into a conservatory, and took a seat by her side on a low couch that had been wheeled in there for the time.

The girl knew what was coming, but she thought she might as well have it over, and dispose of Arthur Ransom's suit for good and all.

With this intention she sat passive while he talked on indifferent subjects for a few minutes, then he took her hands, and said, in low earnest tones,—

"Ruth, I want to know my fate to-night. Am I to be the most happy or the most miserable of men?"

She tried to withdraw her hand, but before she could do so a woman's voice exclaimed,—

"Oh, this is refreshing, and I am so tired!"

And as she thus spoke Edith Moulton, leaning upon Stanhope's arm, came towards them.

"Oh, you here!" she said, in affected surprise, as though she had not seen them enter the conservatory, and had not followed them intentionally. "I suppose you also found the rooms fearfully hot?"

"Mr. Ransom complained of the heat," replied Ruth; "but I didn't observe it myself. There is plenty of room here."

And she moved her dress so that Edith might sit by her side.

"How fearfully thirsty and faint I feel," gasped Edith, as she sank upon the couch.

"Shall I fetch you some water or some lemonade?" asked Stanhope, who had a horror of a woman fainting.

"Please," she gasped, and she leaned back and seemed to find difficulty in breathing.

"Can I get you anything?" asked Ruth; "or shall we help you to my room, and will you lie down for half-an-hour?"

"No; but if you would be so kind as to ask my mother for the salts she always carries," replied Edith, faintly.

"Certainly."

And in an instant Ruth was gone.

Scarcely was she out of the conservatory, however, before the whole manner of the girl, who had pretended to be so overcome, changed, and she turned almost wildly towards Ransom, who had been critically regarding her, and exclaimed, passionately,—

"Arthur, you were asking Ruth to marry you?"

"Well, and what if I was?" he retorted, angrily. "I can't marry you, and you know it."

"Then you really do mean to marry her?" asked the girl, with fearful earnestness.

"Yes, if she'll have me!" was the slow, distinct, and almost sulky reply.

"I shall kill myself if you marry her—I swear that I will. I will come to the church, and I will take poison and fall dead at the feet of both of you, and I'll tell her how you won my love, and how you deceived me as you would deceive her if she were not rich."

"You are mad!" he retorted, hoarsely. "Kill yourself, indeed! You are much too fond of your own comfort for that; and as for winning your love it was easily won, and has been very inconvenient since. I told you I couldn't marry a woman who was as poor as myself, and one would have thought you would have had the sense to see it."

"You swore that you loved me with all your heart, and would be true to me always."

"Bah! I'd swear anything to please a pretty woman," he replied, indifferently.

"And you are determined to marry Ruth?" asked the girl, desperately, as she sprang to her feet and flung her arms wildly above her head. "Answer me once more; I think I am going mad!"

"Ruth does not intend to marry him," said a voice by the doorway.

Edith and Ransom both looked in the direction from whence the voice came, and they saw Ruth standing by the side of Mrs. Moulton, while Sidney Stanhope, with a glass of water in his hand, was just a pace in advance of them.

The consciousness that what she had said had been overheard overwhelmed Edith for the moment. In sudden shame and humiliation she covered her eyes with her hands, then fell forward upon her face.

They lifted her up, thinking she had only fainted; but when her mother saw the red blood oozing from her lips she herself uttered a wild cry, and staggered to the nearest seat.

A doctor was sent for, and he ordered the sufferer to be put to bed at once; but her mother insisted upon taking her home. She felt that if her daughter must die she should die under her own roof.

It was best so, no doubt, for she lingered on for many weeks, always believing she would soon be well again; but daily growing more feeble, and before the snowdrop and the crocus had come with a fair promise of spring, she had crossed that dark river whither neither love nor disappointment could follow her.

* * * *

Sidney Stanhope had left Westwich the morning after the party, without bidding adieu or saying a word to anyone beyond sending a brief note to Mrs. Moulton, in which he respectfully withdrew all claim to her daughter's hand.

He had heard enough to convince him that Edith, even if she lived, was no fit wife for him. Of Ruth he dared not think, and so he went away, and Mr. Coniston only heard through his lawyer that he was alive and well.

What became of Ransom was never definitely known in Westwich. He went away from the town without taking leave of any of his friends, and the last heard of him was that he had sank so low as to become a billiard-marker.

The only event of importance that occurred when the new year was still young was the marriage of Mr. Ralph Coniston with Dora Wrayford.

Nothing could be more quiet and simple than was their wedding, and after a short honeymoon they came back to Wrayford Hall, which they meant to make their home until Ruth was of age, or was married.

"As though I should ever marry!" Ruth had exclaimed, indignantly.

Whereupon her uncle and aunt both laughed heartily.

What Ruth's feelings were towards Stanhope her aunt could only guess.

The girl hid her secret jealously, though she counted the days, and the weeks, and the months that went by, in which he gave no sign of his feeling any interest in her until her heart grew sick with hope deferred, and the dreadful conviction slowly forced itself upon her mind that he cared nothing for her, and that he would never come.

October had come round again, damp, cold, and gloomy, as this time of the year usually is in Westwich; and Ruth remembers with a pang, as she sits on the rug in the drawing-room in the self-same attitude as of old, that this is the anniversary of the day on which Sidney Stanhope made that first and most unlucky call.

Here she sits brooding, thinking of the past, and hopeless with regard to the future, for she has just heard that Mr. Stanhope is going to Africa with a party of friends, and she feels a presentiment that she and he will never meet again.

She does not weep, she has no right to mourn for him, for he is not her lover, and no word of love had ever past between them, and yet she believed and hoped that he loved her, and she knows full well and past all doubting that she loves him.

As she thus sits grieving silently for the happiness which has seemed to pass by her the door opens as it did a year ago, and the self-same servant says,—

"Mr. Sidney Stanhope!"

"Take Mr. Stanhope——"

Then she springs to her feet and presses her hands over her eyes, for she thinks she must have been dreaming, and is repeating over again that never-to-be-forgotten blunder.

But it is no dream, Sidney himself is before her, and Brown had scarcely closed the door when the young man clasped the girl's willing hands in his own, and looking into her sweet eyes he asks, with a smile,—

"Am I to go to the library, Ruth, or may I stay with you?"

"I think you had better go," she replied, saucily; but her eyes said "stay," and he stayed.

Indeed he stayed so long and he talked so much fond nonsense that when Ruth's aunt prudently came into the room before Brown brought the tea, she found the lovers seated side by side, and she heard without any surprise that they had already settled matters, even to the date of their wedding.

"I felt sure that you two were made for each other," she said, warmly, when she heard the news.

"It looked very much as though we were made for other people at one time," replied Stanhope, gravely.

Ruth said nothing, but she nestled nearer to the strong arms and the loving heart that were henceforth to be her shield and her resting-place.

[THE END.]

THE exact site of the notorious Black Hole of Calcutta has just been identified during some excavations inside the gate of Dalhousie-square. Part of the walls have been laid bare, and show that the dimensions of the miserable chamber were exactly recorded, while the walls themselves are well preserved, the plaster being intact on the inner side. The Hole occupies a portion of what was once the north-eastern portion of the old fort, and is now on the north side of the General Post-office. It is proposed to erect here a monument to the victims who perished during the night of June 30, 1756.

THINKING much about self, especially the impressions we have made or are going to make upon others, tend always to deprive us of self-possession. We grow anxious and perturbed, lose simplicity and naturalness, and fall into the very blunders that we dread, and frequent failures weaken our courage and make us shrink more and more from what we ought boldly to approach.

FOUND WANTING.

CHAPTER XI.

Nor in a village, but in Rouen did Christine's letter reach her brother. He and Maddie had arrived the night before at their hotel, and were seated at a late breakfast in a private sitting room the following morning. Maddie was attired in a morning robe, and looked as fresh and pretty as in her maiden days, with not a shadow in her eyes nor a cloud on her smooth brow. Whether Christine's prophetic fears would ever be verified, that period was not near as yet. The bride was in all the enjoyment of honeymoon privileges, and the husband as adoring as the lover.

"We are pretty travellers," said Clifford, "upon my word! It's your fault, Maddie—you're awfully late."

"Well, I am not obliged to be early," said Maddie, contentedly, as she sipped her coffee; "I never was an early bird. I hope we are going to get out of this musty old city soon, Pelham."

"My dearest child! there is all the cathedral to be seen, and old streets and houses."

"A dull country town," said she, pouting. "I like a lively place—something to look at."

"And so people to look at you, eh? And shops to waste money in," said Pelham, laughing—her little airs amused him in these early days, when the thing was a novelty, like a child's beautiful new doll—"I am afraid you are not artistic, dear."

"I am very fond of pictures," said Maddie, indignantly; "auntie and I always went up to the Academy."

"O! course—very nice things there," said Pelham, thinking of his sister's opinion of the Academy. "You should have Christine here—she'd spend the whole day in the cathedral, and only be unhappy when it was bedtime."

"She is coming to live with us, isn't she?" asked Maddie.

"Yes—dear Christine!" said Clifford, who would not have given up his sister even for his wife; "we shall be the happiest trio in the three kingdoms. You and Christine will get on capitally, I think. You cannot tell—we saw so little of her in London."

"I am sure I shall like her," said Maddie, warmly, with a covert look at her husband's face, which had brightened as he spoke of his sister. She addressed herself to her plate.

A tap at the door, and a servant entered with letters. Clifford pounced on them so eagerly that he almost swept them from the waiter.

"Christine, isn't it?" said Maddie, catching sight of the beautiful, clear writing, that would have done honour to a civil servant. "What a long letter! What does she find to say to you, Pel?"

"Oh, a lot—dear child!" said Clifford, tearing open the envelope.

His coffee grew cold while he ran his eye down the page. Maddie went on with her breakfast leisurely, till a sudden exclamation from her husband startled her.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Pelham, pushing back his chair violently.

Maddie stared at him, too astonished to remonstrate.

"Of all people on this wide earth!" said Clifford, laying the letter before him, and pressing his hand over his eyes.

"But what's the matter?" asked Maddie, growing frightened; "is she ill—or ——"

"No—no—she is exquisitely happy—I can see it in every line, though she speaks so little of herself in that way. But to lose her—and to him!"

"What!" cried Maddie, merrily; "has she fallen in love—is she engaged—Christine, who never had any lovers and never wished for them? Why, whom has she seen at the Lonsdales to have done it all so quickly?"

"Who?" said Pelham, angrily; "why, that fellow, Albert Delmar."

"*Who?*" said Maddie, sharply, all the laughter leaving her face.

"To trust her to him," said Clifford, not heeding the question, rising abruptly, and pacing the room; "my beautiful darling! What infernal arts has he used to make her love him like this? He is not so much hurt, after all, if, in less than two months, he can think about anyone else. Fickle as water! And will he be less fickle to her? I wish he had been under the sea before he saw her! If she had only written about him I would have told her to leave the Lonsdales. But, then, who could have dreamt of this?"

"Oh," said Maddie, tossing her head, "what else was there to do in a country house? I thought he was angry when he sent back all my letters without a line, but he is easily consoled. It doesn't matter to me, of course. I have had a very happy escape—but I am surprised."

And angry, too, if the red spots in her cheeks and the gleam in her eyes were to be trusted. She was not the woman to see quietly her image supplanted. She would have been much happier if she could think Albert had hated all womankind for her sake.

"Surprised!" repeated Clifford, and he sat down by her—"I am not. I never believed in him, and I was right. We did not wrong him so very much, after all. I am glad I took you out of his hands, darling."

Maddie smiled at his caress, but she was not mollified; she had made a mistake, but it was not very palatable to think that Albert had. To forget her in six weeks—not to break his heart at all—and to be as happy in somebody else's love as he had said he was in hers! It was Christine's fault, of course—those reserved people were always sly; and she liked flirting as well as anyone—and Albert had been so wretched that he had been led on without knowing it. But she dared not say this to Pelham.

"What is to be done, Maddie?" asked Pelham, after a pause.

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"It will be so awkward—how could one possibly go to the wedding—and I always promised myself to give Christine away! What will she say if I don't?"

Maddie was obstinately silent.

"And yet how can I refuse? How can I refuse Christine anything? What could I say—what reason give? There is nothing in the world against him," Clifford went on, in perplexity. "He has been perfectly straightforward, too—would have written himself, only she preferred to write. And then—then—I *have* wronged him, and I can't stand in his way again."

"Is it an engagement, then?" said Maddie, icily. "You have left me in the dark."

"An engagement—yes. Worse, too—he wants the marriage next month. She has not promised that—she asks what I think; and if I can't come over, she will wait."

"If they marry at all they had better do it at once," said Maddie. "Of course, you can't go—we can't break up our wedding tour for that."

Hitherto Clifford had been so absorbed in thinking of his sister that he had hardly noticed how Maddie received the news of her lover's defection. Now he caught the pique in her tone, and it did not please him.

"I should certainly go if it were anyone else but Delmar," he said, with a touch of haughtiness—"as it is I suppose the thing must go on. I can't tell her the true reason; and if I could she would not allow it as a just objection—nor would it be. Perhaps I am needlessly afraid. I don't think he cared for you so much, my Maddie, and it is best as it is. He will be very fond of Christine."

"I am sure I hope so," with pursed-up lips. Then, seeing the cloud on his brow, she laughed—"You men are fickle creatures, Pelham," she said, ignoring the fact that at least Albert had done no worse than she. And it flashed across Clifford that she could not accuse him—the first time even in thought he had flung back her falseness at her. With an instant self-reproach he turned to the girl, kissing her fondly,—

"Well, my darling, shall I tell Christine to be happy, as we are? There can be little sting left to Delmar if he can ask my sister from me, so in time we may all forget what is past. He must love Christine at last, supposing he does not now. No one could be with her and not love her. But I think he does—I think he made a mistake, don't you, Maddie?"

Maddie's self-love would not let her agree to that; besides, she had sufficiently gauged Albert to have the opinion that he was not likely to have been deceiving himself. She had seen more of his inner self than Pelham had. No, he had rushed into this marriage because he was miserable, and Christine had led him on.

"I don't know," she said, looking down; "if he thinks he can be happy, I am sure we ought not to go against him. I daresay it will be all right. I wonder if he has told her about me?"

"No, I think not. I am sure not," said Pelham, growing pale; "she implies in her letter something that makes me think he hasn't. Besides, I think he would be too proud. But I am bitterly grieved not to be there."

He wrote to Christine that day, giving his full consent, heartily wishing her happiness, with not the hint of a doubt—he was so fearful of her finding out what he had done. In other circumstances he would have begged her to wait a little—have told her honestly he had never thought Delmar a man he would like his sister to marry. Now he was silent, though his views were unchanged; but he persuaded himself all would be well.

He said she had better consent to whatever Delmar wished. His return was uncertain, and Maddie did not seem to desire to shorten their honeymoon. He expressed his sorrow at this, adding that he would send instructions to his lawyers, as her portion was, by her father's will, to become absolutely hers on her marriage or majority.

Christine received this letter the day before Delmar was to leave, and, after reading it, she said not a word; but Kate saw that her eyes, as she folded it up, were full of tears—so rare with her, that Kate began to tremble. In truth, Christine was bitterly disappointed. Nothing but her brother's distinctly-expressed wish that she should not delay her marriage would have induced her to allow it.

She gave the letter to Delmar with the one remark,—

"I can't understand him. Why can't he come?"

He read the letter through slowly, with an inward scornful triumph. Why could he not come? He dared not. But he said to Christine she should do as she wished, only——

"I know," she said, "he wants me to do as you like; but it isn't kind of Maddie, or am I selfish?"

"I shall be jealous if you pit Pelham against me," said Delmar, jestingly. "Then it is settled as he says?"

"Yes," said Christine.

He went back to Danewood, leaving Kate in her glory; for quiet as Christine had asked that the wedding should be, still everything fell into Mrs. Lonsdale's hands. Only a few weeks and he would return; and the day before he left home he gathered together all the presents and letters he had given or sent to Maddie, and which he had found on his return from Strathardle, and locked them away in a cabinet in his study. Characteristically, he did not destroy them—that page of his life was not closed; he chose to keep it open. Ay, though the next day he stood with a girl's soft fingers clinging to his hand and repeated the vow that is so easy to make and so easy to break; and there was no love in his heart, but only the thirst to give back as he had received. And when he knelt for the blessing on this unblessed

marriage, he thought little of the words that were uttered or what they meant; the golden head was bent only in mechanical reverence—he thought but of Maddie and the man who had robbed her from him. Storm and unrest and wild passion, these were strange offerings to make at the altar of God. Trust and love, and holiest purpose—those were the gifts the woman brought.

CHAPTER XII.

The London train drew up in the little country station, and the two porters (there were only two) went forward with provincial slowness to attend to passengers and luggage. From the window of a first-class compartment a girl's face looked forth—a pure-tinted face with a half wistful, half curious expression just now.

"Is this Knights Milwood?" she said, drawing in her head and turning to someone within the carriage.

"Yes, and there's Evans looking out for us." The door was opened and Albert Delmar stepped on to the platform, while the manservant came hurrying up, touching his hat to his master and now mistress. Delmar turned to give his hand to Christine. She stood beside him, while he spoke to Evans, looking on the unfamiliar scene—the long line stretching away, the hills rising on the horizon; nearer, the little station-house, the bookstall, the boxes and bags put out on the platform, the two or three people about who stared at her: things one sees in every country place; but it was all so strange, and she felt a little forlorn. She looked pale and tired, with such wistful questioning eyes, but she stood patiently waiting, almost starting when Delmar spoke to her, as if her thoughts had wandered far away.

"I am sorry I kept you waiting," he said. "Have you got your book? Are you tired? You look it."

"A little, I think."

Disheartened, more than tired, she might have said. She followed him outside, and in two minutes they were driving through deep lanes with rolling country on either side, and here and there the gleam of the river, all lying in the calm sunshine of a September afternoon. It was very lovely, and Christine brightened up, turning her head eagerly as she caught a glimpse of a long, wide lawn covered with great trees, and the boats dancing on the water at the foot of the steps.

"Oh!" she said, "what a pretty place. Whose is it?"

Delmar glanced up.

"Why, mine—and yours," he said, briefly, with no very glad accent; and Christine was silent. A sweep round a sharp turn brought them in front of the old-fashioned house. "A dear old place," the girl called it in her own mind, but she made no remark; she felt chilled by the impression that if Delmar cared at other times about his home, he did not just now. He looked in no mood for hearing ecstasies; and her spirits, which had risen a little during the drive, sank again as they entered the house. This was to be her home, but there was no warm welcome—only a formal presentation to the servants in the hall; and at the foot of the stairs Delmar asked the housekeeper to shew her mistress upstairs, and himself went off through a door Christine afterwards knew led to his study.

Left alone, after her maid had attended to her, Christine looked round the spacious dressing-room. Nothing wanting there—everything for comfort, everything handsome. The sunlight was pouring in in long rays, and she could see from the latticed window the river beyond the shaded lawn. She was glad this room had that aspect, and she leant on the sill with the climbing roses almost brushing her cheek, and the soft, sweet-smelling country air lifting the curls from her forehead. A boat full of people floated by; their merry laughter reached her where she stood, and she looked after them wistfully. What had there been in those few weeks to make her feel herself apart, at eighteen, from these pleasure-seekers? to bring those tears welling up slowly? "I am fanciful, foolish," she said, turning from the window—"perhaps now we are at home it will be different—at least, it is my part to make it different. Something must have troubled him, some difficulty perhaps. Only, if he would tell me and not be so cold, as if I were at a long distance from him. Perhaps he will not be, here at home, and when we are by ourselves—before the servants, of course, he would not say much in welcome. And, besides, why do I need a welcome in words? Of course he knows that I feel sure of it."

Her eye fell on a curtained recess at one end of the room, wherein stood a prayer-desk and embroidered silk cushion. Her lips parted in a smile. Why, everything had been thought of she would like—and who could have thought of it but Albert? She was foolish; worse, very wrong.

She went forward and knelt down, with an earnest prayer to be brave, to be blessed and bless. It was all she could think of to say—she seemed to have no other needs. Then she went down, and slowly turned the handle of the dining-room door, as if she were in someone else's house.

It was the identical room where, months before, her brother had come to luncheon; and now as then the square table in the window was spread for a meal, and the silver and china gleamed in the light.

Delmar stood in the window reading some letters, but he heard the door close and came forward directly, taking her hand.

For a second he seemed to hesitate, or she fancied he did, then kissed her; but he did not take her in his arms, and the kiss was light, gentle, but scarcely tender. He hoped she found everything as she liked.

"Yes, thanks," she said, trying to be perfectly satisfied. "Oh, there was something I wanted specially to thank you for! You have made quite a little oratory in my dressing-room!"

"I didn't make it," said Delmar. "Shall I ring?" crossing to the bell.

"Yes, please. I am sorry—I wanted to owe it to you," she said, smiling, feeling terribly disappointed. "Who did, then?"

"It was my mother's room; I only had it renovated. By-the-bye, perhaps you would like another room—only I kept to tradition in giving you that."

"Oh, I like to have it very much," said the girl, earnestly.

At the same moment a servant entered and behind her a stately deer-hound, who walked in as if the place belonged to him.

Christine exclaimed, delightedly,—

"Oh, what a beauty! I didn't know you had a dog here. What's his name? Colin? Colin," she said, kneeling down by the hound, who was licking her hands and face and waving his tail in majestic joy, "are you going to love me a great deal? Yes?"—with her cheek on his rough coat. "You are a dear old fellow to say so. But how did he come here, Albert?"

"Donald—at Strathairlie, you know—wrote to me after I left that the dog pined; so I told him to send him here. Colin, old boy, are you coming to talk to me, too? But here are some letters for you, Christine."

"From Pelham!" she said, and broke open the envelope. Then she recollected that the high tea, which had been prepared, was waiting, and took her place.

The talk was principally question and answer. She wanted to know all about the house and the neighbourhood, and Delmar told her what he could; but his college acquaintance would hardly have credited this was the man who had been able to keep a whole table interested.

He gave Christine bare facts—no comment, no touch here and there to give point and colour; and it was no wonder these were lacking, for to keep up any talk at all was a terrible effort.

The home-coming was scarcely bearable to him; he had miscalculated his own strength and old memories. Old hopes that he ought to have done with had never been stronger than on this autumn evening. He was glad when Christine took up her letters.

"They are in London," she said. "They have taken a house in South Kensington. How long does it take to get from here to London?"

"About an hour and a-half, by fast trains."

"Then we shan't be so far. We can often see them."

He did not answer this. She glanced at him as he sat in the shadow of the curtain, with the longing to go to him and ask him if anything troubled him—if she could help him. But she was timid, or vaguely afraid of a rebuff, and again she tried to check the sinking at her heart.

She folded up her letters. She would try another charm, and, stealing across the wide hall, found herself in the drawing room.

The pale twilight just showed its white draperies and marble consoles and statuettes, its crimson-flowered carpet and rich rugs. At the far end, the polished rosewood shining out through the gloom, stood the grand piano, and Christine paused before it thinking.

Dared she? She lifted the lid, and then sat down. Those ivory keys were irresistible. The soft, rich tones floated out to the evening air, and the heart of the player grew soothed and patient.

But the listener? He started up at first with the impulse to stop her—to tell her never to play like that. Then he leant his face against the lintel of the window, fighting down with savage force the agony that threatened to master him.

How he had looked forward to this very time—dreamed of it; but, oh! not like this! not to look back eternally to the "might have been"—not to be wracked by his own passions. He might have added—had he known what gave to that moment one of its sharpest stings—not to bear this load of self-reproach.

He lifted himself after a few minutes—they had not seemed minutes to him—and went into the drawing room.

He would be the conqueror, not the conquered; and Christine, as she saw him, grew lighter hearted. She could be the David to this Saul—all would be well.

She built on faith and hope that night, but the building did not, and could not, last long—its foundations were only sand. And yet when she asked herself of what she complained she could not lay hold of anything tangible.

It was an atmosphere her sensitive spirit felt—a lack, an absence. She had all she needed—money at command, unlimited authority over the household; she came and went without question; she had her music, her books, her horse. Society—no. The house was isolated, and those who made up the visiting world of Knights Milwood lived at an inconvenient distance.

Nothing passed beyond a few formal calls on either side.

Besides, there seemed a tacit opposition on Delmar's part to any cultivation of closer terms of acquaintance. Probably few young wives were more lonely than Christine became—she who had come from a school full of lively, happy girls; from a town where she had many friends, and lived a free, bright life.

She had never lived long in the country—she did not like it. Even the beauty could not compensate for the sameliness and dulness.

But she could have borne that if home had been home—if she had not felt that in giving herself to one man she had cut herself off from the rest of her kind.

She could have welcomed interference even with her movements—that, at least, would have shown some interest—anything but this deadly let-alone.

What did it mean—what had she done or left undone? What had come between them

["YOU ARE A DEAR OLD FELLOW," CRIED CHRISTINE, DELIGHTEDLY, "BUT HOW DID HE COME HERE?"]

from the very altar, as it were? If he would tell her—find fault. Even unkindness of word would be better than the deeper unkindness that let her live one life and he another—as far apart as if they were strangers.

It had been so different in the too brief time when she had been only the promised bride—not bound. Then he had been with her constantly—then they had had so much in common; now, how often did she see him? He wrote and worked in his study—she in the drawing-room or her own sitting-room. They sometimes rode together, or went on the river, but not often.

When they did he talked in his brilliant fashion, but it was studiously of subjects outside personal interests—she could never feel herself nearer than an ordinary acquaintance.

She was not meek. There were times when she resented such treatment—when her pride overcame her grief, and she said she had a right to love—to more than cold courtesy—unfailing though that was.

She wearied herself with conjectures, with imaginings. Perhaps he had made a mistake. Perhaps he did not love her as he thought he did; but, then, was that her fault? She could win his love, perhaps, if he would not hold her off so far.

And then it was that it flashed across her, like an evil suggestion, that no words of love had passed his lips. She put it away indignantly. No, perhaps there was some old trouble—she had always thought so—an earlier love, that he had thought he could forget, and had failed.

Well, she would not be hard or exacting; perhaps his knowledge that his loyalty to her was not perfect made him shun her, and if she was gentle and merciful she might draw him away from old memories, and then both would e happier.

There was in her a fund of sublime patience—an unlimited mercy for error that strove to retrieve itself. She took to her heart this new view of Delmar's estrangement, and it only deepened her love.

She said one day, a few weeks after their arrival at Danewood, she should like to see Pelham and Maddie.

"I could run up, couldn't I, and be back for the evening?" she said. She had ventured into the study, and stood by the writing-table "We could have them down here some time, couldn't we?"

"You need not trouble to be back to-night," said Delmar, ignoring her last words. "You will have a pleasanter evening there than here."

Which was true, for the lengthening evenings were a new trial to her.

She lingered by the table. If he would only be more cordial; if he would say he was pleased, or even he would rather she did not go. How gladly she would stay! He went on writing. She took up one of the folios—part of a dissertation on German composers—the first time she had read anything of his; for though she had longed to ask him, she had never gathered the courage.

The subject interested her deeply; her eyes sparkled, and she uttered an exclamation, as she saw a favourite view of her own, expressed in clear, picturesque phrases. The writer seemed with ease to take advantage of all the power and beauty of the language he wrote in.

"Why, that's just what I have always thought!" she exclaimed; "only you have put it so well. What are you going to do with it?"

"Send it to the *Harmony*," still writing.

"That's the paper you wrote for at Oxford; you told me about it. May I read the rest?"

"If you like."

There were but two folios written besides what she had already seen. She read those eagerly. Delmar looked up as she laid them down.

"If you are going this morning, Christine, you will lose your train," he said, looking at his watch.

She came closer to him, putting one hand on his shoulder.

"Albert, will you let me read some other things you have written? And you must have the magazines and papers old things have been published in. I have wanted to ask you so long."

"You can have them if you like."

"But you'll have to look them out, unless I may look; and perhaps you wouldn't like that."

"I will get some for you," he answered, in the same matter-of-course way, neither showing pleasure nor displeasure at her request.

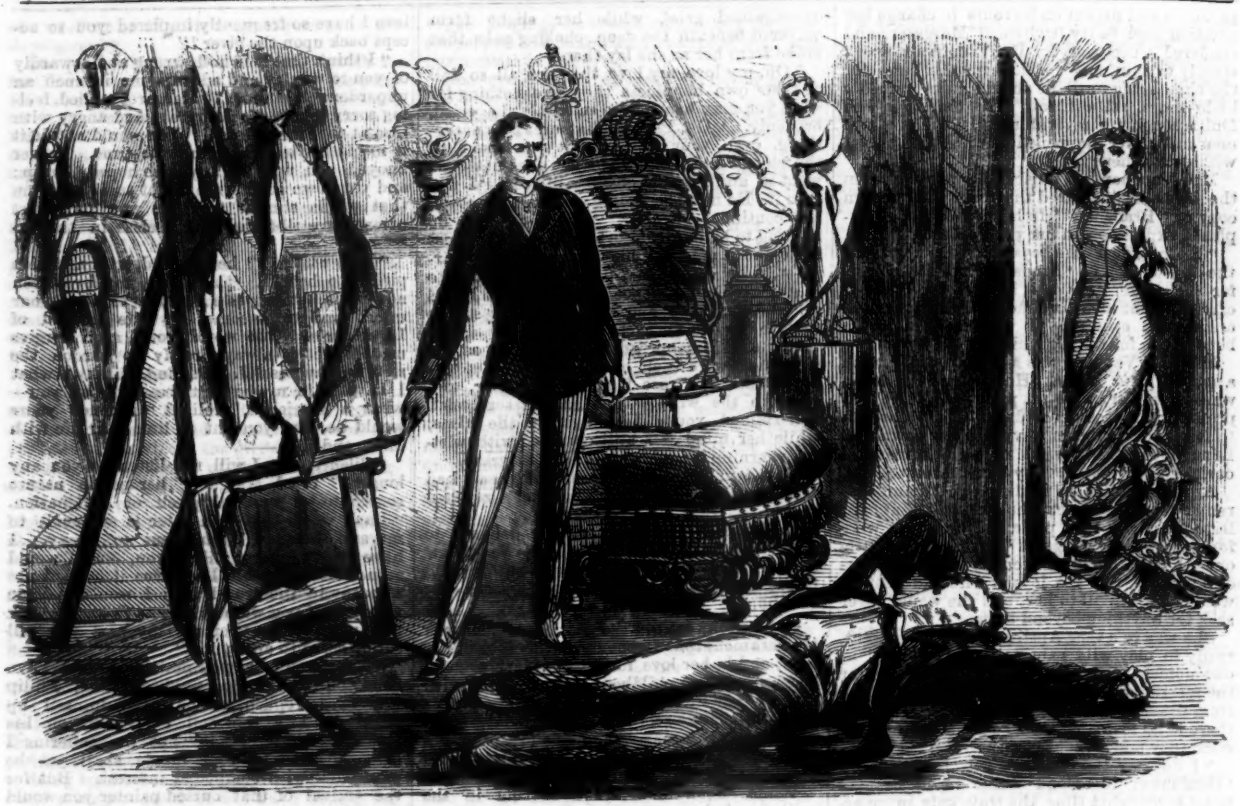
"Thanks. Shall I see you before I go?"

"I'll see you to the station, of course."

And when she came down she found him waiting for her. She had no want of care, and he got her a book to beguile the short journey. Yes, care, courtesy; but is that all that is wanted between husband and wife? A little less care could have been borne easily for a little more love.

(To be continued.)

ON THE USE OF SPECTACLES.—No more mischievous mistake can well be made than the one which is involved in the prevalent idea that the use of spectacles should be put off as long as possible. This becomes evident at a glance as soon as it is understood that the case is one of incapacity of the lens of the eye to adapt itself to near vision in consequence of loss of accommodating power. The continued effort of the delicate mechanism of the eye to accomplish a task which is beyond the measure of its capacity must necessarily be attended with an injurious, as well as a painful strain. Squinting is one of the evil consequences which are apt to ensue if such fruitless efforts are long persevered in.



[A DESPAIRING MOAN BROKE FROM THE PAINTER AS HE FELL SENSELESS AT THE FOOT OF HIS MURDERED PICTURE.]

NOVELETTE.]

SWEET REVENGE.

CHAPTER I.

A SENSE of some important and exciting event shortly to occur seemed to pervade Doctor Vaughan's usually quiet and well-regulated household, while the various members of his large family, from the careworn, fair-faced matron to the youngest children, Willie and Herbert, better known in their own domestic circle as "the imps," since they were always in mischief, were in a state of constant activity from morning till night.

Margaret, Dr. Vaughan's eldest daughter, was to be married on the morrow, and the pleasant stir and commotion that attend the preparations for a wedding served to upset all ordinary routine for the time being, and to drive the Doctor into the safe shelter of his surgery, since that was the only place where he was not likely to be disturbed while taking his time-honoured afternoon nap.

Mrs. Vaughan—never a very strong woman at the best of times—was beginning to feel tired and worn out as the day advanced, leaving so much still to be done. The younger branches, however, free from all care or responsibility, enjoyed the fun and bustle; the trying on of new dresses, the constant ringing at the front door, the arrival of late presents, and the ordinary preparations going on in the kitchen to their hearts' content. Important events at Dullborough were as scarce as angels' visits, and the young Vaughans meant to extract as much enjoyment for themselves from the treat in store as they possibly could.

All other things being fairly *en train* Mrs. Vaughan went upstairs to pack Margaret's trunks in readiness for the morrow. Some tears fell among the carefully-folded garments and dainty little furbelows as she did so; for Margaret was her confidant, her favourite child to whom she had always looked for help in any home trouble or emergency; and the approaching separation between them grieved her to the heart, although she was too brave and unselfish to make a display of her deeply-rooted sorrow.

"If it had only been Philip Margrave," she said to herself, as she fastened the last trunk. "Archie, poor fellow, is a true gentleman; he has plenty of talent, and I know that he will make my darling a good husband, but his want of money is so terribly against him. They will have only a struggling, uncertain kind of existence to look forward to for many years, unless Archie makes a name for himself as a painter before then. Well, there is no help for it now, but I always hoped that my Margaret might never know anything of the care and anxiety that attend a limited income on her own account. Philip would have given her every luxury that heart could wish for, not taking the title that will one day be his into account, and yet she set her face steadily against him from the first. At least her choice speaks well for the unworldliness of her nature."

Margaret Vaughan had indeed shown herself to be singularly free from ambition or worldly motives of any kind, since she had refused to accept the offer of marriage made to her by Philip Margrave, the only son of Sir Percival Margrave a neighbouring landowner with an immense fortune, in order that she might become the wife of Archie Lawrence, a young painter, who possessed little beyond what he was able to earn by means of his palette and brush.

At one time the Vaughans had entertained hopes that Margaret would one day be induced to accept Philip Margrave, although she never held out the least encouragement to him. Her heart then had at least been free, and Philip, who was deeply in love with her, did all in his power to surmount her indifference by unceasing attentions and earnest, passionate pleadings, rendered from time to time as his desire to win her for his bride grew yet stronger upon him.

But he had never succeeded in winning love from her, and then Archie Lawrence had appeared upon the scene to render his cause yet more hopeless. Margaret and the young painter had fallen in love with each soon after their first meeting, the latter's stay at Dullborough being lengthened out beyond all reasonable limits, and before he left it he had obtained Dr. Vaughan's somewhat reluctant consent to their engagement.

It was only natural that the Doctor and his wife should feel disappointed at the choice made by their eldest daughter. They were poor, and they had a large family; the struggle to keep up appearances was often a very difficult one, and a wealthy son-in-law would have been a perfect godsend to them. But they were kind, unselfish parents, and they would not allow worldly interests to stand in the way of their daughter's happiness. They had made a love match themselves in the years gone by, and in spite of many cares and many children some of the old fondness for each other still lived in their hearts, and enabled them in a measure to understand and sympathize with Margaret's choice.

So, with some regret, the engagement had been formally acknowledged, and now at the expiration of a year the wedding was about to take place. Archie Lawrence had taken a pretty little house at Richmond, close to the river, and furnished it in readiness for his bride. Nature had dowered them both very liberally with youth, health, and good looks. Only the gifts of fortune were lacking to them, and they had laid in a large stock of hope to atone for this deficiency.

Philip Margrave had taken his disappointment in very bad part. He had been away from home during the painter's first visit to Dullborough, and his anger on discovering what good innings a rival had made in the meanwhile was intense. His passionate re-

proaches and urgent endeavours to change her decision had fairly frightened Margaret, and rendered it necessary for Dr. Vaughan to speak sternly to him, and forbid him the house for the time being until he should have gained a little more self-control. He had then left Dullborough for several months, and the two men had never happened to come in contact with each other.

Mrs. Vaughan had finished her packing when the bride-elect entered the room with a torn copy of "Bradshaw" in her hand, and a perplexed expression on her pretty face.

"Mother, dear, the boys have torn nearly all the leaves out of 'Bradshaw' to make tails for their kite," she said, laughingly; "and I can't find out at what time Archie's train will arrive this evening. I wonder if we could borrow one for a little while?"

Margaret Vaughan was a girl of twenty, with a slender *petite* figure. Her features, if somewhat irregular, were yet pretty and full of expression; her eyes were "darkly, deeply, beautifully blue;" while her wavy, golden brown hair hung down to her waist in a thick mass of curls, loosely tied back by a broad ribbon.

Anyone skilled in reading the human character from its index, the face, would at once have perceived that pride and ambition were forces of which Margaret Vaughan knew little or nothing. The deft security and happiness of home life, and the joys of wife and mother would be all in all to her, and she would never seek for anything beyond them.

She was in a very April like mood at present, ready to play wild games with "the imps" at one moment, and to melt into tears the next, for the morrow would witness her first separation from the home of her childhood, and, after all, there is no love that can equal a mother's in constancy and patient self-sacrifice.

"I daresay the Gregorys will lend us their 'Bradshaw,' if I send Willie in for it. We must know what time the train gets in on account of having supper all ready," said Mrs. Vaughan. "And there is so much still to be done, I hardly know how we are to get through it before he comes. While you tack the cambric frilling in the girls' dresses, Margaret, I will finish arranging the tables in the dining-room. Leah must come and help me; Leah, child, where are you? You must not keep running away when we are all so busy."

Leah came slowly downstairs in obedience to her mother's summons.

She was Dr. Vaughan's second daughter, but not the faintest personal resemblance existed between the two sisters.

Leah was a thin, tall girl of seventeen, with an unformed figure, an obese complexion, great solemn, dark eyes, with long, fringing lashes, and a quantity of soft, dark hair, knotted up untidily at the back of her small head. Her old, sage green dress and the knot of scarlet ribbon at her throat toned in well with her dark southern face, upon which a stormy expression of repressed grief or anger rested at the present moment.

But the others were much too busy to pay any attention to Leah, or to remark the absence of all gladness or excitement from her manner.

She was only a raw girl recently emancipated from the school-room, not of any particular importance in the family circle as yet, and her ever-varying moods and strange, uncertain temper excited but little notice from those around her.

She helped to set out the tables for the wedding breakfast, while her deft, skilful brown fingers arranged fruit and flowers with artistic ease and gracefulness.

She went to and fro at her mother's bidding like a swift, noiseless automaton more than a living, breathing girl.

When there was nothing more for her to do she went upstairs again to her own little room, thankful to be released.

Once there, with the door securely locked against all intruders, her frigid self-control suddenly vanished, and she threw herself upon the floor in a paroxysm of passionate, unrestrained grief, while her slight form quivered beneath the deep, choking sobs that broke from her as she lay there.

"Oh, my love, my love, they are all so full of their own happiness they care nothing for what you may be made to suffer!" she cried, brokenly. "Oh, Philip! Margaret gets everything, even your love, and it seems so hard she should have that when she does not even want it, and I would give my life could I but gain it. He must be feeling so miserable now," she continued, wearily, "and yet I can do nothing to help or comfort him, since he does not care for me. All his love is given to Margaret, who can turn from him so coldly to marry Archie Lawrence instead. Life is full of cross-purposes and sad, pitiful mysteries that no one can unravel."

Her sobs became gradually fainter as the passion-fit wore itself out.

Presently she rose from off the floor, and going to the window pressed her sorrowful, tear-stained young face against the glass, while her mind was still occupied with wistful, yearning thoughts of Philip Margrave.

Unknown to anyone but herself, Leah had fallen deeply in love with her sister's rejected suitor.

Philip Margrave had seldom deigned to notice her when visiting at the Vaughans' house in days gone by. She was but a child in his eyes, and he had always treated her as such.

But Leah possessed the passionate southern temperament that ripens so quickly into maturity; and in her love for Philip Margrave she had passed from childhood to womanhood with scarcely any intermediate stage.

It was no mere schoolgirl feeling that he had unconsciously awoke within her breast, but a strong, deeply-rooted attachment that would cease to exist only with life itself.

While Leah was thus suffering in the solitude of her own room the work of preparation was going on briskly down below.

Mrs. Vaughan—the tables being laid in readiness for the wedding breakfast—was in the act of locking the dining-room door to prevent "the imps" from making a descent upon the various good things arranged therein, when it came to her mind that she had neglected to get some lace-bordered paper that would be required on the morrow.

"I will go down to the library and fetch some," said Margaret, willingly. "I shall not be long away."

"I would send one of the servants, only they are both busy," replied Mrs. Vaughan, dubiously. "I don't like you to go, Margaret, since it will soon be dark. It was very foolish of me to forget the paper this morning."

"Oh, I shall be back before the daylight is quite gone," said Margaret, reassuringly. "It will be my last trip into Dullborough for some time to come, you know."

She went to the library, and then, having obtained the required article, she walked quickly back in the direction of home.

Winchelsea-crescent, where the Vaughans lived, stood on the outskirts of the town, and a rather lonely piece of road had to be traversed before reaching it.

Margaret had nearly arrived at the end of this road when a tall form came suddenly towards her through the fast falling darkness, and Philip Margrave stood once more beside her.

He was a largely built, handsome man, with light hair and complexion, grey eyes, and faultlessly regular features. But the expression on his set, determined face was not pleasant to behold as he bent down to address the frightened girl beside him.

"Margaret, I saw you go out just now," he began, without any kind of preliminary, "and I resolved to await your return, and to make a last appeal to you before your contemplated marriage really takes place. Have you no pity for me that you refuse to become my wife, and do your best to madden me by thrusting the love I have so frequently implored you to accept back upon the giver?"

"I think that it is both wrong and cowardly of you to waylay and address me in such an unpardonable manner!" Margaret replied, feeling sorry for Philip Margrave and angry with him at the same time. "You would not do it if my father were here to protect me. I never buoyed you up with any false hopes, Philip; and your own good sense might surely tell you that words similar to those you have just uttered are ill-timed and useless in the extreme."

"Why useless?" he inquired, with agitation pitiful to behold. "Margaret, my love, even now it is not too late for you to alter your mind, and to become my wife instead of Lawrence's. The world would soon forgive us, since it is always ready to pardon the rich and successful. Darling, think of what I have it in my power to bestow upon you—what a cherished, idolised existence yours would be were you but to link your life with mine, and then——"

"Silence, sir, I will not listen to you any longer!" cried Margaret, her gentle nature roused to an unusual pitch of indignation. "Each word that you utter is an insult to me and the man I am about to marry. I have never, never liked you, and I would sooner marry Archie Lawrence if he had not a penny in the world than I would become your wife if you were as rich as Cresœus. After this plain declaration on my part you will surely cease to annoy me."

"Yes, I will leave you now, since you have done your best to spoil my life for me," Philip Margrave replied, as he drew himself up proudly, while the evil expression on his face grew yet deeper; "but the suffering I have endured at your hands shall yet be paid back with compound interest. But for the arrival of that cursed painter you would ere this have been my wife, I shall not forget what he has robbed me of, and you and your husband that is to be will live to repent the day when you first aroused my anger. I will spoil his triumph, if it takes me half a lifetime to do it."

With these words he left her, and Margaret almost flew over the remainder of the road in her desire to reach the safe shelter of home.

Archie Lawrence's speedy arrival, however, served to drive all unpleasant thoughts from her mind for the time being.

If the young painter was less handsome than Philip Margrave, intellect and inherent nobility of disposition served in his case to atone for the want of mere physical perfection of form and feature.

It was a very gay little party that met around Dr. Vaughan's table that night. For them the river of life flowed on smoothly and swiftly, with ripples of hope and happiness on its surface, while Leah's almost hopeless love and Philip Margrave's bitter disappointment formed the dark, silent undercurrent gliding beneath it.

CHAPTER II.

When Margaret's wedding had become a thing of the past, and Dr. Vaughan's household had settled down again into the quiet monotonous routine of daily life in the country, Leah became strangely restless and dissatisfied with her surroundings.

The peaceful home life, the round of little duties and simple pleasures that had always satisfied Margaret, only served to fret and irritate the more impatient and ambitious spirit of Leah.

She had never cared much for them, she had frequently longed to be translated to some more congenial sphere, since her nervous, imaginative nature craved instinctively for pleasure and variety.

But the longing had always been suppressed as a thing impossible to be realised. Now it had come back to her again with fresh force, and the additional stimulus of an aching heart and a love that met with no return, although

she was just as ill able to gratify it as in the days gone by.

She positively hated Dullborough, with its familiar streets and faces, while even the painful pleasure of occasionally seeing or speaking to Philip Margrave was denied to her, since he had left Dullborough, soon after Margaret's marriage, in order to join a party of young men who were going up the Nile on a pleasure trip.

The latent ambition in Leah's nature began to develop itself at this time very rapidly. Margaret, under a love wound, would, in all probability, have pined and died; Leah, on the other hand, sought in her fiery, imperious manner to find a substitute for love—something that would deaden the pain at her heart, and create fresh interests and—if possible—fresh joys in her life.

At this critical period ambition came to her aid; it took the place that love had left vacant, and whispered to her of a fair, golden future, of great triumphs and dazzling possibilities yet to be achieved, till the girl's heart thrilled beneath the influence of its own tender passionate day-dreams.

For Leah possessed histrionic talent of the highest order, and a proper course of training alone was required to render her a finished actress. Whenever any private theatricals took place in the vicinity of Dullborough Leah was always in request to take the principal part, and to drill the other and less competent amateurs into something like proficiency.

Her natural instincts all tended strongly in the direction of the stage, and many a time had she rehearsed her favourite characters up in the lumber-room to no other audience than an astonished mouse or two. The comprehensive glow and fervour she displayed in so doing would have delighted the heart of a stage manager could he but have beheld the young aspirant to dramatic honours.

Leah was aware of the existence of this buried talent—for buried it really was, to all intents and purposes, in such a place as Dullborough. Certain vague longings to have it recognized and acknowledged by the world had frequently possessed her, although they had never taken any definite form.

Now that heart and mind were both so restless and ill at ease, the old desire for an enlarged sphere of action had come back to her with renewed strength; she yearned to do great things, only the way was still wanting.

One night, however, after some private theatricals had taken place at the house of a neighbour, and Leah had, as usual, been loudly applauded, she chanced to overhear part of a conversation that was being carried on between her father and one of the other guests, an elderly lady, by no means lacking in shrewd worldly wisdom.

"My dear sir, your daughter is an *artiste!*" she exclaimed, with genuine admiration. "She ought not to remain content with being merely an amateur actress. Talent like hers would quickly be recognized, and make its way upon the stage. A quiet domestic life will, I am certain, fail to satisfy such a gifted, passionate nature. Were she my daughter I should place no hindrances in the way of her accepting the stage as her profession!"

"Leah, an actress! Bless my soul, I couldn't think of such a thing! I wouldn't permit it," said good Dr. Vaughan, who, in common with many other respectable middle-class people, entertained the mistaken idea that it was extremely derogatory to be in any way connected with the stage.

"Why not?" inquired his more sensible companion, warmly; "it is a noble profession, and those who stand at the head of it are respected and received on equal terms by people of the highest rank. It contains some black sheep, I admit, but so do all other professions, and it would be hard indeed to visit their shortcomings upon the many who lead useful and blameless lives."

The conversation then took another turn, and Leah listened to it no longer. But her vague longings had suddenly taken definite shape, and life had ceased to appear dull and purposeless in her eyes.

She would be an actress, she would go on the boards, not as an amateur, but as a professional, willing to accept the world's opinion as to the talent she was supposed to possess. The fuel had long been ready, and it only needed the spark contained in the words already described to make the fire of ambition burn brightly in Leah's breast.

That very night, on their return home, she acquainted her father with her desire to become an actress, and besought him in earnest, pleading words that startled Dr. Vaughan considerably, coming as they did from shy, proud Leah, to give his consent to the same.

For a time he flatly refused to do so, since both to his wife and himself the idea of their daughter making an appearance upon the public stage was distasteful in the extreme.

Moved, however, by Leah's entreaties and fits of weeping, conscious that she was by no means happy in her home life, that her hopes and aims differed widely from those of their other children, and perhaps a little influenced by the fact that several persons, whose social position came far before their own, had lately "taken to" the stage, Leah's father and mother at length gave a reluctant consent to her request. She was declared *free* to tread the boards, since all her talent and ambition pointed in that direction.

Accompanied by her father she went to London in order that she might undergo a strict examination as to her merits at the hands of an individual well-known in theatrical circles, who had trained and instructed some of the leading actresses of the day.

Somewhat to Dr. Vaughan's disappointment, Leah emerged from the ordeal with flying colours. Andrew Ashmead not only offered to take her as his pupil, but he volunteered to board and lodge her as well for the two years that must elapse ere she would be qualified to appear upon the stage in any character of importance.

In return for all the expense and trouble thus incurred he reserved to himself the privilege of forming her engagements at the end of that time, and sharing any salary, large or small, that she might earn equally between them.

After a great many inquiries had been made, and satisfactory references had been given and exchanged, Dr. Vaughan consented to accept these terms on Leah's behalf, and to leave his daughter in the care of Mrs. Ashmead, a lady-like, delicate woman, who had no children of her own, and who gave a warm welcome to her husband's pupil. A formal agreement rendered binding upon both the contracting parties was drawn up. Then Dr. Vaughan returned to Dullborough, and Leah commenced her new life under the assumed name of Pauline Mowbray, since, in deference to the wishes of her family, she would not allow her real name to transpire in any matters connected with the stage.

Plenty of hard work, and very little pleasure awaited her at the onset. But the work was to her liking, and Andrew Ashmead had no occasion to urge upon his pupil the need for constant and unremitting study. On the other hand, he had sometimes to remonstrate with her for tasking herself so heavily. Prolonged rehearsals, hard reading, wearisome technicalities and difficult stage business, without a good knowledge of which the most talented actress would fail to win public approval, had to be gone through and mastered by degrees. Ashmead prided himself greatly upon his pupil's rapid progress, and the inherent power, the inborn talent, that developed more and more under skilful tuition.

Sometimes, at the theatre with which he was connected, Leah went upon the stage in some minor part, just to accustom her to the surroundings and the steady concentrated gaze of many people. But her *début* was not really to take place until the end of the second year, and meanwhile, Leah worked unceasingly in order to render it a success.

A great hope sustained her during the period of probation, and served to render it full of keen purpose and interest. If the power was really in her to become a famous actress, might not Philip Margrave be drawn, among others, to the theatre to admire or decry the acting of the newly-risen "star." That first love of his must be growing faint and shadowy now, she told herself hopefully. Some other flame might, alas! have already replaced it. But, if such was not the case, Leah secretly determined to exert every force in her gifted nature to win him for her own, and to gain his love in return for that which he had all unconsciously possessed for several years past, namely, the strong unquenchable love of her own heart.

But they were destined to meet before the much-coveted fame had fallen to Leah's share. Not in the crowded theatre, but in the drawing-room of a lady friend of Dr. Vaughan's, who had invited the girl to spend as much time with her as she could spare from her studies, did Leah and Philip Margrave, now Sir Philip, owing to the death of his father, meet again.

"I've got another visitor coming presently," said brisk, dark-eyed little Mrs. Seymour, as she sat by the fire one duly afternoon, shading her face from the blaze with a feathery hand-screen, while Leah knelt upon the hearth-rug, her dark eyes gazing dreamily into the glowing coals. "I hope he won't be much longer, for I want my cup of tea very badly indeed. You ought to know him, Leah, for his country seat is in the vicinity of Dullborough. Sir Philip Margrave is my ideal of a really nice young man—neither fast nor piggish, with plenty of self-possession and *savoir vivre*. I am always glad to see him, and I'm quite sure that you——"

But Leah put a stop to any further remarks by springing up abruptly from the hearth-rug, as a vigorous hand plied the knocker, and the bell rang loudly.

"Dear Mrs. Seymour," she cried, eagerly, "if Sir Philip should fail to recognize me at once *please* do not betray me to him. Introduce me by my stage name—not my real one. I have not seen him for years, and he is by no means likely to remember the shy, sullen Leah Vaughan of days gone by. Let us bury her for the present, and bring Pauline Mowbray to the front instead. For several reasons I do not wish to reveal myself to him as Dr. Vaughan's daughter."

"Very well," said Mrs. Seymour with an amused smile, "you are too sensitive by half about your profession, my dear, but your wish shall be regarded. We will have a little farce all to ourselves, and pass you off to Sir Philip as Miss Mowbray, a young lady he has never had the pleasure of meeting before to-day."

The words were scarcely uttered ere the man-servant announced Sir Philip Margrave, and Leah with calm face, but rapidly beating heart, found herself once more in the presence of Margaret's old lover, and the object of her own pure deeply-rooted affection.

Sir Philip came forward to greet his hostess, wondering, as he did so, who the strangely beautiful girl standing beside her might be.

Exposure to the sun had bronzed his fair face, and he had grown a thick, tawny moustache. But for these trifling alterations he was the same perfectly dressed, easy-mannered *insouciant* Philip Margrave of old.

"This is Miss Mowbray, Sir Philip," said Mrs. Seymour, indicating Leah as she spoke, with a wave of the feathery fan. "She is kind enough to come and cheer me up a little sometimes when I am tired of my own society. And this kindness on her part is rendered more valuable, since she has so little time at her disposal."

"Lady clerk or governess, I suppose," he remarked mentally, as he bowed to her none the less courteously on that account. "A splendid girl, no matter what her occupation may be. I thought a lady always had so much time at her disposal," he added aloud; "that she was compelled to work it up,

as it were, into slippers and smoking-caps But these days of high pressure and competitive examinations alter everything. Every day sees some old idea shelved and a new one put into its place."

"Pray do not imagine that I am going in for anything half so intellectual as a competitive examination," Leah replied, with a musical laugh. "I am in training for the stage."

"Indeed!" he observed, looking at her with fresh interest and admiration. "Then, in that case, your intellect will have a far wider scope, and your choice of a profession demands no apology."

"Have you been to Dullborough lately?" inquired Mrs. Seymour, wickedly trying to arouse Leah's alarm lest her identity should be revealed to the baronet.

"Well, no. I ought to be there now," he replied penitently. "Lots of things connected with the estate want looking into, but it is such a wretched hole, from a society point of view, that I shirk going there as much as I possibly can. The Vaughans and the rectory people are almost the only civilized beings in the neighbourhood."

"Who are the Vaughans?" inquired Leah, demurely, a spirit of wild daring coming over her as she spoke. She would not allow herself to be out-witted by Mrs. Seymour.

"Oh, they are the doctor's family," he said, frankly; "very nice people, but poor, awfully poor."

"I used to know some of the daughters," continued Mrs. Seymour, coming to Leah's rescue, as Philip dealt her this unconscious stab. "Are any of them married yet, Sir Philip?"

"I believe the eldest girl, Margaret, was married to a painter named Lawrence nearly two years ago," replied the young baronet. The tone in which he delivered this piece of information was so cool and matter-of-fact that Leah inwardly rejoiced as she heard it. Surely no man could thus allude to a woman for whom he still entertained either love or liking!

"Then there was another daughter, Leah," said Mrs. Seymour, still bent on mischief; "what has become of *her*, Sir Philip?"

"I really don't know!" he rejoined, with genuine indifference. "She was a tall, plain, awkward-looking girl when I last saw her. I daresay they have married *her* to some local magnate before now."

Mrs. Seymour fanned herself vigorously in a desperate effort to conceal the smile his words had given rise to, while Leah felt both amused and relieved. Philip Margrave was by no means likely to recognize in Pauline Mowbray the tall, plain, awkward-looking girl he had once known under the name of Leah Vaughan.

"For the ugly duckling of the family had, during his absence, blossomed into superb queenly womanhood. Her tall, graceful form owned the true poetry of motion, her lustrous dark eyes gave light and expression to the delicate clear cut face with its olive complexion, while the soft dark hair that had once formed her only beauty was skilfully arranged to form a natural diadem round the small firmly-poised head.

The trio in Mrs. Seymour's drawing-room chatted together for nearly an hour, all sorts of topics blending themselves in with the conversation. Before he took his leave Sir Philip Margrave had contrived to extract from Leah the fact of her approaching *début*, while he had announced his intention of being present at the same. In one sense of the word her triumph had already commenced.

CHAPTER III.

A MODERATE share of success attended Archie Lawrence's artistic career for a year or two after his marriage with Margaret Vaughan.

Turning his back with a sigh of regret upon the heroic school of painting that he loved so well, although it had always proved unremunerative to him, he devoted himself chiefly to the production of "pot-boilers" and simple domestic scenes, since the dealers were, as a rule, willing to take pictures of this kind off his hands as soon as finished, the general public preferring them to art of a higher kind.

The price paid for them was a very modest one, it is true, but by working constantly at his easel Archie could earn enough to keep his head above water, and prevent dull care from taking up its abode in the pretty little home at Richmond; and his young wife—already a good housekeeper, thanks to her mother's careful tuition—eked out their little income, as he laughingly declared, in a manner that was simply marvellous and which bordered closely upon witchcraft.

But there were times when he could not content himself with the good but, for him, inferior work by which he earned their daily bread—times when the genius inherent within him boldly asserted its right to be heard, and made him unhappy by revealing to him that he was not doing justice to himself, or his art, while he produced nothing beyond the despised "pot-boilers."

Margaret began to dread these fits of despondency, and she did all in her power to dispel them by means of loving, hopeful words of encouragement when they overshadowed her husband; but she could not always check or hinder them from taking their course.

The "pot-boilers" would be thrown contemptuously aside for a while, and some large, partly-finished picture, full of real merit, but quite unsaleable from a picture dealer's point of view, would take their place on the easel. Then ensued the inevitable disappointment, and the picture that no one would purchase had to be turned with its face to the wall, like a child in disgrace, to make room once more for the "pot-boilers," when the young painter's stock of ready money began to run short.

The Academy, too, did not favour him any more than the outside world. Other men might succeed in getting their works skied, floored, or safely hung upon the line; his pictures usually came back to him again like bad pennies, he sometimes remarked, with a sad smile.

Patience is a rare virtue in a man, but Archie Lawrence had an unusual share of it, and his despised works of art would be set aside with hardly a word of complaint; while Margaret, moved to unusual indignation, said severe things about the want of discernment evinced by the hanging committee, and proved herself generally to be a most partial critic.

But if a cloud sometimes hung over their little household sunshine generally predominated. Love, the great enchanter, lived there, and his transforming power is well known to be boundless; it can make poverty fair to look upon, and bring a smile to the lips of care.

Lawrence and his wife were too young for any ordinary trouble to depress them long at a time; youth, hope, and good spirits generally won the victory, and a day that threatened to be gloomy and dark in the morning not unfrequently wound up with a pleasant evening spent on the river, or a gay little party of Archie's Bohemian acquaintances, clever, thriftless, delightful people, with hearts as light as their pockets, since the true Bohemian so long as he can proudly lay claim to a shilling will turn down any lane that presents itself in order to avoid meeting trouble face to face.

A new joy came to Margaret's gentle life when her boy was born. He proved to be a fair, round-limbed, happy-tempered child, with his father's great, dreamy brown eyes, and his mother's wavy, golden-brown hair.

With husband and child to love and care for, Margaret's cup of blameless happiness grew brimming full, and she asked for nothing more. Lawrence, too, was very proud of his boy. He sketched him in every possible attitude; and he was never tired of watching little Archie as he sat on the lawn trying to weave the daisies into chains with his chubby, dimpled fingers, or ran to meet his young mother with a cry of joy, eager to rain a shower of warm, sweet kisses from rosebud lips upon her face when she raised him in her arms.

The childish voice made music in their home, and gladdened their hearts, even while it gave Lawrence an additional sense of responsibility, and spurred him on to work yet more vigorously, since he had given such precious hostages to Fortune.

Leah was frequently to be found at Richmond. She was very fond of Margaret, although their natures differed so widely, and she had too much good sense and generosity to entertain any feelings of anger or resentment because her sister had succeeded in winning the love of Philip Margrave—a treasure that she would fain have called her own. Leah knew quite well that Margaret had made not the faintest effort to obtain what to her was but a useless triumph, since she had flatly refused to become Philip's wife when once her heart had passed into the keeping of Archie Lawrence. Her refusal had thus left the field open to Leah, who resolved to strain every nerve in the effort to win first the admiration and then the love of the man who, all unconsciously, had served to influence her life and develop her true character.

Leah's passionate, highly-strung nature delighted in vivid contrasts. The Lawrences' peaceful home life possessed a charm for her, since it stood out in such bold relief from the constant whirl of excitement and anticipation that distinguished her own, and which became intensified as the time for her first appearance upon the stage drew nigh.

Her Sundays were frequently spent at Richmond; while Margaret's boy, to whom she was godmother as well as aunt, always hailed her arrival with delight. Her quick, vivacious manner and dark, luxuriant, tropical beauty had a peculiar fascination for him. He was pleased to give her a high place in his favour, and in return Leah loaded him with toys and presents of every kind, while she looked with jealous eyes upon any rival candidate for the petted, cherished darling's affection.

Both the painter and his wife took a keen interest in Leah's welfare and her professional progress. They contrived to exert a considerable amount of influence for good over her wilful, impulsive nature, and her approaching *début* was looked forward to by them with a feeling of mingled pleasure and anxiety.

They knew nothing, however, of the meeting that had taken place between Leah and Sir Philip Margrave, when, owing to her changed name and appearance, he had completely failed to recognize her as Margaret Vaughan's sister. Leah had not mentioned it to them. Although, as a rule, she was frank and communicative respecting her own affairs, she could be very reticent when anything that deeply affected her happiness was in question.

Matters had progressed thus far all round when Archie Lawrence, standing in the middle of his little studio, threw down his brush, at the close of a day's hard, unremitting work, and declared that he would paint no more until the next morning.

"Put the boy to bed, Maggie," he said to his wife, who sat near him embroidering a dainty little frock, "and then get ready for a row on the river. There will be a glorious sunset by-and-by, and I am in good rowing condition to-night. After being cramped up in this bandbox of a room all day I feel as if I could row or walk miles without once stopping."

So Margaret laid aside her work and went upstairs to put little Archie to bed—a labour of love that was never by any chance delegated to their one servant. But the putting him to bed was one thing, the getting him off to sleep when there was another. Margaret had a splendid contralto voice, and she usually sang the young tyrant to sleep, but to-night he happened to be more wide-awake than ever, and a great many favourite tunes had to be gone through before he floated away into the pleasant dreamland of childish slumber.

Nearly an hour had elapsed before she went down to join her husband, who, cigar in mouth, was waiting for her at the door.

"Well, little woman," he remarked, good-humouredly; "if I were not as patient as Job I should growl at having to wait all this time for you while young Scaramouch is being persuaded to go to sleep. If we don't make haste we shall lose the sunset."

"I know I have treated you shamefully in being so long," she replied, with a smile; "but he was very restless, and I had to sing him to sleep."

"Well, if he expects you to go half way through Hymns Ancient and Modern with him every night, I suppose there is no help for it," said Lawrence, with an air of calm resignation. "He generally gets his own way in everything. Get in, Maggie, and take the steering-rope; the oars are under the seat. This is indeed delightful after the heat and burden of the day."

He had pushed the boat off from the shore, and they were floating gently down the river. The cool evening breeze blew in their faces; the purple and golden glory of the sunset steeped sky, earth, and water in rich melting loveliness, while the musical ripple of the water, or the faint chirp of some sleepy bird, alone broke the sweet solemn stillness that heralds the approach of night.

"If one could only put a scene like this upon canvas," said the painter, with a smile, as he bared his head to the pleasant breeze. "Our efforts are but sorry daubs when compared with Nature's majestic handiwork."

"It is almost too lovely," Margaret replied, with a look of intense happiness shining in her clear blue eyes as she spoke; "and yet some people say that it is a bad world, full of cold, selfish, or revengeful beings. They must surely be guilty of exaggeration, since the world is so fair, and even the worst men and women are not without their redeeming virtues."

"Your experience of the world and human nature is rather a limited one, Maggie," her husband remarked, with an air of grave amusement. "I hope from my heart that nothing will ever occur to make you regard either from a less favourable point of view. Those coloured theories, as a rule, are not——"

But a cry of alarm from Margaret interrupted him at this moment, as a boat, much larger than their own, came swiftly towards them; while the rowers, who had evidently dined all too freely, narrowly escaped upsetting the smaller craft, upon which they bore down without any attempt to alter their reckless course.

A few vigorous strokes placed Lawrence and his wife in safety, although their frail boat rocked perilously for a while, and the painter grew white with anger as he recognized the needless alarm and danger to which his wife had been exposed.

"The clumsy idiots!" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "I believe they were all the worse for drink. Do you know that fellow who bowed to you as their boat shot by ours, Maggie?"

"Yes. It was Sir Philip Margrave," she replied, falteringly. "Did you ever see such a stern, cruel face as his, Archie? It may be foolish, but I am almost afraid of him. I fancy that if it lay in his power to do so, he would injure us in some way, even now."

"Nonsense, you dear little goose," said Archie, recovering his equanimity, as he pulled rapidly in the direction of home. "What harm could Sir Philip contrive to do to us, even if he wished—like a stage villain—to punish me for winning the treasure he once sought to obtain for himself. I can almost find it in my heart to pity the poor beggar when I think of the loss he has sustained, but they need not have given us quite such a narrow shave. Since you are tired and inclined to be nervous, Maggie, respecting your old lover, we had better make for the shore."

They landed almost in silence, for Margaret, although she refrained from putting her fears into words again, could not shake off the strange, unreasonable dread of Philip Margrave that had taken possession of her. She had noticed the look of intense repressed hatred with which he had regarded her husband as their boats passed each other, and the ironical courtesy that had distinguished his salutation. A chill feeling of approaching evil crept over her as she remembered his passionate words uttered on the eve of her wedding-day.

"You and your husband that is to be will both live to repent the day when you first aroused the anger of Philip Margrave. I have lost you, it is true, but I will spoil his triumph if it takes me half a lifetime to do it!"

She tried to dismiss the fear he had awakened within her breast by reflecting that it was quite out of his power to injure either herself or her husband. But reason cannot always supersede feeling and intuition, and the fear still haunted her when the river was fairly out of sight, and they were safe within the shelter of their own home.

The evening post had brought a letter for the painter during his absence, and its contents proved to be the reverse of satisfactory. A picture that he had fully expected to dispose of on advantageous terms was about to be returned to him again, since it had failed to meet with approval. Several others had shared the same fate lately, and the disappointment was thus rendered more intense.

Margaret strove to cheer and console her husband as the despondent look that pained her so deeply clouded his face, and robbed it of all its recent gladness. But the meeting with Philip Margrave and the arrival of the ill-omened letter had served to damp her own spirits, while the indefinite mysterious sense of coming evil came back to her with fresh force, and filled her heart with vague, nameless terror.

CHAPTER IV.

It was one o'clock in the morning, but the wax-lights on Leah Vaughan's dressing-table still burned brightly, while Leah herself stood in front of the cheval glass brushing the soft dusky hair that well-nigh shrouded her tall, slender form, and fell in rippling waves to her small, satin-slippered feet.

She was feeling too intensely happy, too full of excitement for sleep to visit her eyes yet awhile. For her the great crisis that stamps a lifetime was just over, the rubicon had been safely passed, and triumph, full and overwhelming, had awaited her on the other side. In other words, she had that night made her first appearance upon the stage in an important character, and success had crowned the combined efforts of her inherent genius and long, patient study.

Leah possessed the true artist nature which enables its owner to merge his or her own individuality for the time being in that of the character portrayed, and to bring each hidden thought, feeling, and motive to the surface.

It requires no little courage to give a bold and original conception of a world-known character, the manner of delineating which has become stereotyped. Such an attempt is usually followed either by immense and immediate success, or complete failure.

Leah had made the attempt, and made it triumphantly. A Rosalind so fresh, so delightful, and far removed from the old stage traditions, had not appeared within the memory of the oldest playgoer.

She had taken her large and critical audience fairly by surprise. They had assembled for the purpose of seeing a *debutante*, and a finished actress, in all the fresh loveliness of her youth. Her great talent, accentuated by careful training and long study, had charmed and delighted them by her wonderful rendering of Shakespeare's sweet heroine.

The fashionable bijou theatre had echoed with thunders of applause when Leah bowed her acknowledgments at the end of the play, while bouquets of fragrant hothouse flowers fell thick as hailstones around her.

Mr. Ashmead, almost off his head with delight, had given his pupil a fatherly kiss when she came off the stage, and congratulated her in the warmest terms upon the flattering reception she had gained.

"All the critics are here!" he said, excitedly. "There will be a long account of to-night's success in the papers to-morrow morning. They'll give a favourable account of your acting, every man jack of them! I can see it in their faces; and you'll be famous, my dear Miss Mowbray, before you hardly know where you are. The photographers will be after you like a swarm of bees when once your name becomes popular, and your face will soon be looking at us from every window!"

"With some distinguished clergymen supporting me on one side, and a member of the Royal Family on the other, I suppose!" she replied, with a smile. "Photographers do not show much regard for consistency in their mode of arranging their stock-in trade. I shall not give them many sittings, however, for I do not think papa would like my photograph to become common property, and I am quite sure that I should not like it myself. Let us go home now and tell Mrs. Ashmead all about it; I know that she is longing to be made acquainted with the result of your pupil's first appearance."

But Leah had said nothing to him respecting another triumph of the evening which for her alone had been full of sweetness far outweighing the pleasure she derived from the loud and continued plaudits of the large audience.

Sir Philip Margrave had been present from the time the curtain rose until it fell at the conclusion of the last scene.

His attention had been riveted upon her, and upon her alone, whenever she appeared upon the stage; and perceiving this, with all a woman's keenness, Leah had exerted her inborn talent to the utmost limit, less in the endeavour to take the hearts of her audience generally by storm than in the effort to win the admiration and secure the love of the man who regarded her with ever-increasing wonder and interest as each succeeding scene served to develop some fresh phase, some new charm, in her sympathetic rendering of the character entrusted to her.

The most exquisite bouquet that fell to her share later on had come from Sir Philip Margrave's box. She had singled it out from among many others, and carried it away from the theatre with her. It was in her dressing-room now, carefully placed in a crystal vase filled with water, and its rich, heavy sweetness flooded the warm night air.

She did not know that he had come round to the stage-door in the hope of seeing her only a few minutes after the carriage containing Mr. Ashmead, her maid, and herself had driven off in the direction of home.

The knowledge that she had thus missed him might have afforded her some disappointment. But, then, was she not looking forward to a meeting with him at Mrs. Seymour's on the morrow, when his congratulations—more valuable to her than anybody else's—would doubtless await her?

Leah felt restlessly happy as she stood before her glass in the dead of the star-lit night, brushing her long hair, and softly humming some bars from an old song.

Life had suddenly opened out before her, teeming with fair dreams of wealth, fame, and happiness; of golden opportunities for doing good; while through them all, like a low, sweet refrain, ran dreamy, haunting thoughts of the love that would one day come to her in return for her own—the peerless love that would form the centre around which all other joys and interests should revolve, owning themselves to be but secondary things.

Thanks to her large salary she would be able from time to time to send money to her sorely embarrassed mother, to purchase some long-coveted surgical instruments for he father, and to reign presents upon the brood

of younger brothers and sisters still remaining in the old home nest.

This reflection caused her heart to beat with fresh happiness, for the Vaughans were a very united family, and Leah knew well what an amount of interest and quiet, but deep satisfaction her success would afford to them all.

"Father and mother must come up to town to see me as Rosalind," she said to herself, with a little smile. "They are too good and too sensible to be ashamed of their actress daughter so long as she remains, like Cæsar's wife, beyond suspicion! And perhaps some day they may even feel glad that she took to the boards. I shall be able to do so much more for them now, especially if my success really proves to be solid and lasting. And yet, if my profession should only enable me to do one thing, namely, to win Philip Margrave's love, to stamp my own image upon his heart in place of Margaret's, I think that I should for ever after feel grateful to it. Dear Philip, if only—but, there, I will not stand in front of the glass any longer," she continued, severely, "talking to myself and building castles, like the sentimental heroine of some rubbishing three-volume novel. I'll try to calm down a little, and go to bed, after the fashion of a reasonable mortal, or I shall not be in good order for my work to-morrow."

When she descended to the breakfast-room on the following morning Leah laughed merrily as she looked at the number of daily papers Mr. Ashmead had cut and arranged by the side of her plate, each paper being neatly turned down at a paragraph relating to the performance of the previous night.

"What a dear old goose he is!" she exclaimed, as she took up paper after paper and read with glowing eyes the differently worded accounts of her own triumph they contained.

Some were terse and critical, some discursive and full of unqualified praise, but all agreed in saying that an actress possessed of great artistic power, not to mention her personal qualifications, had appeared upon the stage, where she would doubtless occupy a high position.

When Leah had scanned the last paper, she laid it down with a little sigh of relief, and a pleasant feeling of security that had not been hers before.

She had looked forward to these public comments upon her acting with some dread, and now that the critics had stamped the half-mark of their approval upon her success, it seemed to be a more definite and firmly established thing.

After rehearsal Leah paid a visit to Mrs. Seymour. That little lady had witnessed her young friend's *début*, and she overwhelmed her with congratulations which, if somewhat gushing, were still very real.

But as they chatted together, sitting side by side on a velvet lounge, Leah's eyes wandered almost unconsciously in the direction of the door.

Philip Margrave knew her usual hour for visiting Mrs. Seymour. Surely he would not fail to put in an appearance to-day, of all days, she told herself, as the fear of possible disappointment began to overwhelm her. But Philip Margrave was too deeply interested in the young actress to neglect any opportunity of running himself in her society.

He entered Mrs. Seymour's drawing-room a little later on, and his pale, clear-cut face took a more animated expression as his glance rested upon Leah, whose small, graceful head, with its wealth of dark, loosely-coiled hair, was bent over a tangled skein of crimson silk that she was charitably disentangling for Mrs. Seymour.

"I went behind the scenes last night when the performance was over," he said, in the quiet, well modulated tone habitual to him, after the ordinary greetings had taken place between them, "but to my regret I found the star had already vanished from sight, and the lesser luminaries not possessing any attraction for me, I soon took my departure."

"I think you are, one and all, doing your best to turn my head with flattery," Leah retorted with a smile that amply atoned for the reproachful words; "first the audience, then Mr. Ashmead, then the critics, then Mrs. Seymour, and, lastly, you. I shall have to take common-sense for my balancing pole, or such a sudden influx of undeserved praise will make me giddy."

"It would be impossible to praise you too highly, Miss Mowbray," he replied, looking earnestly at her as he spoke. "What an exquisite treat you gave us all last night! Why, the discovery of a genius like yours is really the discovery of a new face, something to give jaded men and women an intellectual stimulus. The realistic plays of the day contain so little real literary merit—the praise connected with them being really due to the carpenter—that it is quite refreshing to fall back upon Shakespeare, by way of a change. I shall frequently figure among your audience."

"You will ruin yourself, though, if you always buy such expensive bouquets to throw on the stage!" said Leah, with a smile, tremulous from very happiness. "I have got last night's trophy at home now; it was much too lovely for me to leave it behind with the rest."

"How I envy those flowers!" replied Philip Margrave, earnestly; "and how can I thank you sufficiently for bestowing so much notice upon them?"

"They were the best," said Leah, with downcast eyes and a demure expression. "I only showed my worldly wisdom when I singled them out for special notice on that account."

"Then the giver had nothing at all to do with your choice?" he inquired, in an injured tone.

"He may have influenced it to some degree," she answered, with a sudden flush of colour to cheek and brow as she spoke; "but I have always been fond of flowers from a child."

"And you shall never be without them now," he replied, tenderly, with a little amusement at the innate truthfulness of her disposition. The young actress was beginning to exert a strong influence over him, and the old love gradually faded from his heart as the new one gained additional vitality. Leah's rare beauty charmed and fascinated him, while her powers of mind, her swift, changing, impulsive manner, and generally acknowledged talent aroused his admiration and respect. Even had Margaret been free and willing to become his wife, he would, in all probability, have turned from her now to bestow all his attention upon Leah, who bewildered even while she attracted him.

And yet, although Philip Margrave's early love no longer occupied his thoughts, the desire to revenge upon her and her husband the pain and disappointment they had caused him in days gone by still existed. The injury had left no scar behind, but Philip's unforgiving spirit still urged him on to inflict some crushing blow in return for it. He kept himself well acquainted with Archie Lawrence's private affairs, and a scheme was even now taking shape in his brain that boded no good for the unsuspecting painter.

But when in Leah's presence no trace of the cloven foot was allowed to show itself. His attentions were marked, unmistakable, and Leah's hopes were rapidly nearing fulfilment, her lover had all but declared himself, when something occurred to destroy the harmony previously existing in their lives and render them incapable of coming together in the usual manner.

CHAPTER V.

Archie Lawrence was not permitted to travel so quickly along the high-road leading to fame and fortune as Leah herself. While the name of the successful young actress was on every lip, and her praises were being loudly chanted by all who were familiar with the stage, Lawrence continued to paint pictures and sell them at a price far below their real value.

Then a severe illness overtook him and threw him far behind in his work. He recovered at length, thanks in a great measure to Margaret's careful nursing, but his little reserve fund had nearly melted away during this period of forced inactivity, and it took him some time to replace it.

Had Leah but known of the pecuniary embarrassments that so frequently overtook the Lawrences, she would instantly have placed her purse at their disposal. But Archie Lawrence's sensitive pride would not allow him to seek assistance from any of his wife's relatives; and when Leah happened to be staying at Myrtle Cottage, the bright side of affairs alone was permitted to come under her notice.

But at length a promise of help, a little cheering notice and encouragement, fell to the share of the persevering young painter in a very unexpected manner. It brought him no money at first, it is true; but it held out to him the hope of earning a great deal at no distant period, while it seemed to revive his flagging energies, and increase the keen longing for fame that had been his from the first.

A well-known R.A., the engravings of whose much admired works are to be found in many English homes, happened to see one of Archie's pictures that was exposed for sale in the window of a shop in Wardour-street. It aroused his interest and admiration to such a degree that he took the trouble to obtain Archie's address from the dealer. On the following day he went down to Richmond, introduced himself to the astonished and delighted painter, and courteously requested permission to view some of his other works, since the one he had already met with betokened the possession of no ordinary talent on the part of the artist.

With trembling hands Lawrence brought his neglected darlings forward from the various dusty holes and corners in which they had peacefully reposed, and placed them in a good light for his distinguished visitor's inspection.

The R.A. praised some of them, although he frowned at others; and, after listening attentively to the tale of frequent disappointment and systematic neglect that Archie unfolded to him, he promised to do all in his power to assist the young painter, and to bring his works into the notice they really merited.

He sent some artist friends on a visit to Lawrence's studio soon after; they, in turn, introduced him to other brethren of the brush, and thus he gained a footing in the purely artistic circle which had so long refused to recognise or admit him as "one of us."

He was very much elated, poor fellow, by the pleasant, but moneyless, symptom of progress thus accorded to him.

Fortune would, as a matter of course, soon follow, he told himself hopefully, while fame itself, always dearer to the artist mind than fortune, would, ere long, be his as well.

So, with little to cheer him in the present beyond blissful dreams of a golden future, Archie Lawrence set to work upon another picture intended for the Academy—a picture that would, doubtless, owing to his increased reputation, gain admission, and thus fare better than its luckless predecessors.

The encouragement he had gained had nerved him on to attempt yet greater things; and the subject he selected as a fitting one on which to concentrate his now ripening powers in one mighty effort to achieve lasting fame called for nothing less than genius to do it ample justice.

He went to old Homer for inspiration, and the parting that takes place between Hector and Andromache on the walls of Troy, when the great, much-dreaded warrior becomes for a time the loving husband and father, was the particular episode chosen.

Margaret stood for the tearful, pleading Andromache, while her lovely boy smiled from the vast canvas as Hector's child. Thus the two faces he loved best on earth regarded

the painter day by day as he worked steadily on, heedless of everything save the picture then in course of completion, and upon which so many hopes depended.

He had selected that happy moment in the otherwise pathetic incident when Hector, to please his child—

> "The glittering terrors from his brows unbound,
> And plac'd the beaming helmet on the ground;
> Then kiss'd the child, and lifting high in air,
> Thus to the gods preferr'd a father's prayer."

His work gained rapidly in power and beauty as he toiled at it from early morn till dusk, and his hopes grew yet higher as his beloved masterpiece neared completion.

Margaret, though, became seriously uneasy at her husband's thin, haggard appearance. The picture seemed to have taken possession of him; he had neither time nor attention to spare for anything beyond it.

Some weird old German myths, read long ago, recurred to her mind as Archie grew visibly gaunt and thin, while the cruel work that absorbed all his strength and energy, and prevented him from eating and sleeping as usual, became more grandly impressive than ever. His very life seemed to be bound up in it, and Margaret trembled lest a bitter disappointment should await him in the end. What effect such a disappointment would have upon his overstrained nature she hardly dared to imagine.

At length, greatly to her relief, the picture stood forth a finished work, and the uncertainty they were in respecting the verdict that the hanging committee would presently pass upon it formed the only rock ahead.

Meanwhile, Archie became cheerful and sociable once more, willing to resume the habits of a civilized being, and his good little wife was careful to cast no cloud of doubt over his brief spell of sunshine.

A private view was granted to those artist friends of his who had kindly taken him by the hand.

They came, saw, and approved; the few gravely-spoken words of praise and commendation uttered by them being of more real value than all the gushing raptures and indiscriminate approval bestowed on the painter by ordinary acquaintances at such a time.

On the day after the private view Archie Lawrence received a note from the R.A. who had been the first to recognize his unusual talent, which ran as follows:—

"Dear Lawrence,—Met a Sir Somebody—I forget his name—at the club last night, who happens to have heard a favourable account of your "Hector and Andromache." He is coming to see it, with some idea of ultimate purchase in his brain. Keep the price up, since I believe he can well afford to pay.—Yours truly, "R. M."

"What a good fellow he is," remarked the painter, gratefully, as he handed the tersely-written note to his wife; "always ready to do other people some valuable act of kindness. I strongly suspect the 'favourable account' alluded to came from his own lips. Well, if 'Sir Somebody' buys my picture we shall be set up with ready money for a long while to come, little woman, but when it is gone I shall feel almost as if I had sold part of myself. No picture has ever been half so precious to me as the 'Hector.'"

Archie's little studio was put in perfect order by Margaret in honour of the expected visitor. She even went to the length of filling all the vases and jars it contained with flowers to give it a more pleasing aspect. Then she went back to the sitting-room and took up her work, unable altogether to control the excitement and new pleasant suspense that thrilled through her at the idea of a wealthy purchaser. For to practical Margaret fortune for herself and those she loved meant so much more than fame.

A knock—a ring—and the servant, previously instructed, hurried to open the door. Then came the sound of a voice that seemed strangely familiar to Margaret as the visitor entered the studio, where Archie Lawrence was awaiting his arrival.

The painter was more surprised than pleased on finding himself face to face with Sir Philip Margrave. They had only met once before, when a collision between their respective boats had been so narrowly escaped upon the river. On that occasion, however, the painter had contracted a dislike for his wife's old lover that he found very difficult to shake off.

"I think you have received a note, Mr.—er Lawrence, informing you of my intention respecting your lately finished work," said the baronet, with a cool and perfectly unembarrassed air. "Should it, upon inspection, suit my taste, I shall in all probability become a purchaser."

"The note you allude to has reached me," replied Archie Lawrence, "but owing to a lapse of memory on the part of the writer, the name of the intended purchaser has not transpired."

"Then pray allow me to introduce myself," said Sir Philip Margrave, handing his card to the painter as he spoke. "I was well known to Mrs. Lawrence previous to her marriage, although the pleasure of making her husband's acquaintance has been reserved for the present moment."

The tone in which he uttered these words was perfectly courteous and conventional, and yet there was a strain of suppressed irony running through it that annoyed the painter sorely. Why had this man, of all others, come forward as a purchaser when the work of a successful rival was in question? Was it to prove that he had forgiven Lawrence for having won Margaret away from him in the days gone by? The painter's simple, honest nature, willing to put the best construction on the actions of others, induced him to accept this self-prompted explanation, although a strange feeling of reluctance to allow his cherished masterpiece to become Philip Margrave's property still possessed him. It was like handing a favourite child over to the tender mercies of a man whom he secretly distrusted.

"So this is the picture," the baronet remarked, with a peculiar smile, as he took up his position in front of the easel. "A valuable work of art beyond a doubt. Some of those fellows spoke of it last night as being the best that you have ever produced. Is that correct?"

"Yes," replied Archie Lawrence, frankly; "I have put the best work that I am capable of into it, and my hopes of fame rest chiefly upon this, my latest and most successful effort. Sold or unsold, I intend it to go to the Academy."

"Oh, by all means," said Philip Margrave, that peculiar smile resting again upon his face as he spoke. "It shall go to the Academy after to-day if you still wish to exhibit it. And now for business. I am willing to purchase the picture; you have only to name your price."

Somewhat reluctantly, considering what a poor man he was, the painter did name it. Without making any demur Philip Margrave wrote a cheque for the amount and handed it to him.

"You will give me a receipt, please," he said, carelessly; "just as a matter of form."

Archie Lawrence gave the required receipt, and then the two men stood side by side, silently regarding the picture that had just changed hands.

"The face of Andromache seems very familiar to me," Philip Margrave remarked, presently. "I could swear that I have frequently seen it before."

"My wife consented to act as my model," replied the painter, sorry to think he had placed Margaret's face upon the canvas, since Philip Margrave had purchased it. "Doubtless, since you have met her at different times in the years gone by, you recognize the likeness?"

"I do recognize the likeness!" said Philip Margrave, with a sudden flash of hatred shining from out his light grey eyes. "Could I fail to remember the face of the woman who did her best to blight my life, not so long ago, by turning a deaf ear to my entreaties, and spurning the gift of title and fortune I laid at her feet, because a beggarly painter had won her love during my brief absence from home? I told her on the eve of her marriage-day that I would make you both suffer double for the pain you have caused me! The time has come for me to fulfil my promise or threat, whichever you like to call it. So much for your masterpiece, on which all your hopes of fame depend. See, like a savage critic, I am about to cut it up for you."

And before Archie Lawrence could prevent him, he had produced a sharp, thin knife, of foreign manufacture, and gashed the triumph of art before him from top to bottom in half-a-dozen places, till the canvas hung in long strips from the frame.

"Madman! fiend! what have you done?" cried the unhappy artist, as he gazed wildly upon the scene of his cherished work.

"This is my Roland for your Oliver!" replied Philip Margrave, with a cynical shrug. "And, after all, I have only done what I please with my own. Shall we send it to the Academy now, Lawrence? It would create a perfect *furore*."

But Archie Lawrence made no reply. One bitter despairing moan alone broke from his dry lips, as he fell senseless at the foot of the murdered creation.

That moan brought Margaret to the studio terrified and breathless. One glance at its occupants and the contents of the great easel sufficed to acquaint her with all that had occurred. Gently she raised her husband's heavy head upon her breast, then with an expression of horror and reproach upon her face, that haunted him for many a long day after, she looked at Philip Margrave, and without a word held out her hand in the direction of the door.

CHAPTER VI.

On leaving Richmond, soon after the little episode already described had taken place, Philip Margrave felt by no means inclined to go straight back to town.

The story of his doings at Myrtle Cottage, his purchase of the artist's lately-finished and much-admired work, and its subsequent fate might get wind, especially now that some well known R.A.'s had taken Lawrence by the hand, and were doing their best to bring him on, thanks to the undeniable talent he possessed. Popular feeling might in that case wax warm against him for a while, and Clubland itself grow too hot to hold him.

The motive which had prompted him in his revengeful act might not leak out, however; Lawrence and his wife would, in all probability, strive to keep it secret; and some other interesting topic would soon succeed in driving the memory of his own unprecedented conduct from the popular mind.

He would go away for a week or two, until the whole affair had blown over and become a thing of the past. Even supposing it to have been public property—which was still a matter of doubt—society is not slow to forgive a male offender when he happens to be rich and a bachelor; and Philip felt certain that on his return to town a cordial greeting would await him, while people would be charitably blind to his doings in the past.

He had contrived to wreak his long-cherished revenge upon the man who had once injured him—according to his own version of the matter—by wooing and wedding the girl upon whom his own heart had been set.

Most men would have forgiven and forgotten such an injury long ago; for Archie Lawrence had been guilty of no mean or dishonourable tactics in winning his bride; his courtship all through had been perfectly fair and above board.

But Philip Margrave's cold, hard, self-centred nature cherished hatred far more easily than love; and since the painter had ventured

to cross his path and carry off the prize he had singled out for himself, Philip determined to punish him for such unpardonable audacity sooner or later.

He had done so, and certain twinges of conscience were boldly attacking him in return, as the express carried him swiftly away from the scene of his vindictive act.

Hitherto his ideas as to the justice and propriety of revenge had been confined to theory. Now that he had put them into practice they made him feel very uneasy.

When merely under contemplation an action presents such a different appearance to that which it assumes when once it has taken place and become a fixed, unalterable fact, to be answered for in this world or the next. Philip Margrave almost wished his day's work undone as he unwillingly recalled to mind Margaret's look of horrified reproach, and her husband's despairing cry, uttered as he fell senseless at the feet of his mutilated picture.

He had gone a little too far, he acknowledged gloomily to himself; but surely the fellow would recover, and go on with his work as usual! He had no desire to wear the mark of Cain upon his brow. A picture more or less in his studio ought not to affect Lawrence so deeply; and had he, Philip, not purchased the picture in question before bringing his knife to bear upon it? He had sought to punish the painter through his ambition, and he had well-nigh succeeded in depriving him of his life into the bargain.

Philip Margrave resolved to send his valet to Richmond with strict orders to keep himself well posted up in the events that transpired at Myrtle Cottage—said events to be wired to his master as they occurred without delay. Not until he heard that Lawrence was likely to recover could he realise the extent of the sickening dread he had experienced lest the painter's untimely death should be laid at his door by the stern Nemesis of inward conviction and popular opinion.

His present destination was a village near Shrewsbury, where a bachelor friend, who had given him an open invitation to come when he liked, owned a small estate. Much to his annoyance, however, on arriving there Philip Margrave was informed that Squire Bawson had been called away from home unexpectedly on the previous day, owing to the illness of a relation.

There was nothing for him to do under the circumstances save to seek quarters at the village inn—called by courtesy an hotel—the landlord of which received his unexpected guest with great satisfaction, and a vast amount of fussy attention into the bargain.

"I think you will find everything very comfortable and quite to your mind here, sir," he remarked blandly, washing his hands with invisible soap and imperceptible water after the fashion of landlords and waiters in general, as he spoke. "We always do our best to please and satisfy our visitors, and my good lady cooks herself."

"Indeed, that must be rather a painful operation, I should imagine," said Philip drily, as he took possession of his rooms in anything but a pleased and satisfied frame of mind.

In the next few days he amused himself by taking long walks about the neighbourhood, when it was fine, and writing an article intended for a scientific journal to which he was an occasional contributor when it rained, as it frequently did for hours together.

Before leaving this quiet spot, Philip Margrave wished to arrive at a satisfactory answer to a very important question, one that was likely to affect his happiness in a vital manner.

Should he, or should he not on his return to town, ask Pauline Mowbray, the celebrated young actress, to become Lady Margrave?

Rich and well-born himself, he did not feel very anxious to meet with either of these qualities in a prospective wife.

He could afford to pick and choose—a luxury not enjoyed by the majority of men when matrimony is in question. A clever, beautiful woman without either rank or fortune would be infinitely more to his taste than a plain heiress, or a fair patrician of only average intellectual merits. The idea of marrying Pauline Mowbray and robbing the public of a recently gained and much-prized acquisition, a new dramatic star, by so doing, had a peculiar zest for Philip Margrave.

Then he was deeply in love with her, and this love formed yet another reason why he should endeavour to secure her before a whole host of rivals entered the field against him.

Other men of good position had married actresses, and their wives had been well received. Pauline's graceful, tall and unconscious dignity, aided by her husband's influence, would quickly secure for her a favourable reception from society in her new character. How queenly she would look seated at the head of his table, Philip reflected, with the family diamonds gleaming in her soft, dark hair, and sparkling amidst the lace that rose and fell on her white bosom! Yes, he would snap his fingers at Mrs. Grundy, and marry Pauline, in spite of that dear old lady's horrified remonstrances!

He did not even anticipate a refusal or a disappointment of any kind in connection with the offer he had decided to make. Pauline's bearing towards him had served to encourage rather than to damp his hopes of winning her, when once he should have screwed himself up to the proposing point.

The story of his recent doings at Richmond, if actively circulated, might reach her ears. But in that case he would soon be at hand to give her his own revised version of it, and she would not be likely to take much interest in the Lawrences or their affairs, since, according to his own idea, they were perfect strangers to her.

Philip Margrave remained at the inn till his friend came home again. Then he spent a week or two with him; after which period of dullness and seclusion the town-loving baronet was quite ready to return to London, and face any unpleasantness that might be in store for him there.

He called at the Ashmead's house on the day after his return, for he was anxious to get the important interview with Pauline over without delay.

She was alone when the servant ushered him into the drawing-room, and as he advanced to greet her with outstretched hand he became aware of a marked coldness—a studied reserve in her manner which had never been there before.

"They've been telling her some confounded nonsense about the Richmond affair," he thought, angrily, "and she is inclined to view me in the light of a second Mephistopheles! However, it will not take me long to set matters right again when once the ice has been broken between us."

"I have been away for nearly three weeks," he remarked, plaintively, as he seated himself beside her, "and yet you have not even said that you are glad to see me again, Miss Mowbray. I have been counting the hours till now in my desire to enjoy the pleasure of your society once more. You might, in return, have given me a warmer welcome."

As he uttered these words Leah's dark eyes regarded him steadily, while an expression of mingled sorrow and reproach shone in their clear depths.

"You had no right to expect a warm welcome from me of *all* people, Sir Philip," she replied, coldly. "The slight acquaintance existing between us would hardly justify anything of the kind!"

"Slight acquaintance!" he repeated, with genuine astonishment. "Why, we have been meeting each other nearly every day for months past, and I have never attempted to conceal the nature of the feelings I entertain towards you. Pauline, speak plainly to me, and say what has served to prejudice you against me during my short absence? When I tell you that I am here for the purpose of asking you to become my darling wife, you will understand better how your changed manner grieves and perplexes me!"

But she only turned away from him to bury her face in the velvet sofa cushions and burst into a flood of tears.

"Pauline, what is the meaning of this?" he inquired, earnestly. "Have you no love to give me in return for that which I offer you?"

"Yes, I do love you!" she sobbed, in all the generous abandon of a grand nature; "and I have looked forward to the time when you would seek to win my love, and place your own at my disposal. But now everything is changed. Although I love you I cannot—I dare not—become your wife; and your own act has forced me to arrive at this conclusion."

"At least you will consent to explain the meaning of such enigmatical words?" said Philip Margrave, angrily.

"Is it necessary for me to do so?" she inquired, sadly; "or have you already forgotten the occurrence at Richmond in which you figured so prominently?"

"I fell out with an artist there a few weeks ago," he replied, undauntedly, "and the ruin of a picture, for which I had previously paid, was the result. Some garbled version of the matter has, I presume, reached your ears; but I cannot tell why it should influence your decision with regard to your becoming my wife, or in any way affect our mutual happiness!"

"Not when Margaret Lawrence, for whose loss you revenged yourself by destroying her husband's cherished work, and bringing him to the verge of the grave, is my beloved sister?" continued Leah, rising as she spoke, and boldly confronting her astonished wooer. "When we two met, shortly before my first appearance upon the stage, you failed to recognize me under my changed appearance and my assumed name, and, for reasons best known to myself, I did not then undeceive you. I am Leah Vaughan, and now you know why, after what has happened, I can never become your wife."

Leah Vaughan! Was it possible that a thin, gawky school-girl had really possessed the power of changing into such a magnificent woman?

The question passed through Philip Margrave's mind almost mechanically, as he regarded her with a sensation of mingled astonishment, vain regret, and passionate admiration.

"Leah, why should one wrong, mistaken deed serve to keep us asunder, my darling?" he cried, wildly. "You will forgive me the pain that I have all unintentionally caused you. Had I known they were related to you I would have pardoned them and allowed them to go free for your sake."

"You can bring forward no excuse for the cruel, revengeful deed of which you have been guilty," Leah continued, with forced calmness, "and therefore we must part. Why, the very fact of your seeking to injure poor Archie Lawrence because Margaret chose him for her husband instead of yourself, goes to prove that she still holds the first place in your heart."

"She does nothing of the kind," he replied, fervently. "Leah, I swear to you that from the time of my first meeting with you here in London, after you had undergone such a wonderful transformation from the Leah of other days, I ceased to care for your sister, and my love became yours alone."

"If what you tell me is really true," said Leah, "your pitiless deed only assumes a yet more unpardonable aspect. You frankly confess that you cherished revenge in your heart when the cause that had first given rise to it no longer existed. You punished poor Margaret's husband for his audacity in gaining her affection, even when you had ceased to care for her yourself. Your attempt at self-exoneration only serves to add to your guilt in my sight, and to reveal the utter want of forgiveness and generosity that characterises all your actions. After what has occurred I cannot consent to link my life with yours. We must part, and for the future our intercourse,

when we happen to meet in society, will be of the slightest."

And Philip Margrave, too proud to plead when pleading was of no avail, went out from her presence with a strange, dreary sense of misery and utter blankness resting upon him. His revenge, once sweet to the taste, had now become exceedingly bitter.

CHAPTER VII.

Philip Margrave's revengeful act proved a blessing in disguise to Archie Lawrence, thus defeating the intentions of the man who entertained such a rooted dislike towards him, and who had done his best, or his worst, to injure him when he mutilated the picture upon which the painter's hopes of fame and success chiefly rested.

It is true that a brief but severe illness had followed close upon that exciting scene in Lawrence's studio; but the painter was young and strong, he struggled back to life and health again; and, meanwhile, his friends had not been idle.

They had received an account of the affair from Margaret's own lips, given without any reservation, and their indignation at such a piece of heartless vandalism and unrelenting hatred had taken a practical form.

Out of a delicate consideration for Margaret they would not allow the actual motive for Philip Margrave's deed to transpire, but the story of the deed itself was freely circulated. The society journals got hold of it, and tried with the earnestness of a private detective to obtain a "clue" upon which to build up a romantic narrative for the enjoyment of their readers. Failing this, they threw out mysterious hints and guesses, which answered the purpose nearly as well; and as Sir Philip Margrave happened to be a somewhat prominent member of society these paragraphs caused him considerable annoyance. Archie Lawrence, and his works too, had never attracted so much notice before. "The talented artist whose masterpiece had for some unknown cause been thus recklessly destroyed by a well-known baronet," became by a freak of society one of the lions of the day.

People of rank and fashion now found their way to Myrtle Cottage who had never even heard of Archie's existence before. He received several commissions before he was sufficiently recovered to execute them, and a picture of his, sent to the Academy in place of the one destroyed, was accepted and hung on the line.

This realization of a long cherished desire, together with the favourable notices that followed it, served to imbue him with fresh hope and courage, and in a great measure to console him for his lost work. He felt that he had it in him to paint other pictures quite equal in power and beauty to the "Hector and Andromache"—the fragments of which had been carefully put away out of sight by Margaret during his illness. He had at length obtained a fair share of notice; the world of art looked favourably upon what he had already produced; his pictures no longer remained for months upon his hands if they failed to suit the dealers; and with fortune thus smiling upon him, he had but to work steadily on in order to increase the reputation that his great talent and the romantic incident connected with his artistic career had gained for him.

And while all these things were occurring at Richmond, Leah was engaged in earning her own share of laurels on the stage. Already a public favourite, she bade fair to become one of the most popular actresses of the day. Andrew Ashmead could afford to pick and choose among the many tempting offers from London and provincial managers that he received on her behalf.

But, in spite of her success and the money it brought her, Leah's heart was no longer in her profession. She acted well from a sense of responsibility and a natural desire to please, although the keen enjoyment in delineating character and winning applause that had once been hers had deserted her altogether.

The aim that had formerly given interest and colour to her life no longer existed. Philip Margrave had rendered himself unworthy of her love; she had sent him away from her, and refused to entertain the idea of ever becoming his wife. It was for the sake of gaining his love that she had valued fame so highly and worked so hard to obtain it. Now that he was lost to her beyond all hope of recall the applause of the whole world would have failed to afford her lasting pleasure.

She had banished him from her presence; but she could not prevent herself from loving him as well as ever, in spite of the evil qualities he had displayed. There were times when she taxed herself with having been unnecessarily harsh and unmerciful, in sending him away without so much as one kind or forgiving word.

Archie Lawrence's good fortune rather tended to increase this feeling, since it proved that Philip had not inflicted any lasting injury upon him. Leah began to think more tenderly of the culprit, and to adopt a relenting mood; but Philip, unfortunately, was not at hand to take advantage of this change in his favour.

Finding that society, after the part he had taken in the Lawrence affair became generally known, was very much inclined to give him the cold shoulder, he had left England in a rage and started for the Continent.

Thus with no settled purpose in view, with only an unfortunate love affair to sadden the past and darken the future, Leah worked on with smiling lips and aching heart, wondering sometimes at the barrenness and desolation that characterized her inner life as she did so.

She spent a great deal of her spare time at Myrtle Cottage with the Lawrences. But no allusion to Philip Margrave ever passed between them. He was tacitly ignored, and Leah's acquaintance with him remained a profound secret to her nearest relatives.

At the end of a long fatiguing season the young actress was ordered by her physician to go abroad, in search of the rest and change of air that she greatly needed. Archie Lawrence and his wife being about to start for Southern Italy Leah decided to go with them; and the little party, accompanied by nurse and child, crossed the silver streak, and, without stopping at Boulogne, went straight through to Paris.

A strange thrill shot through Leah's heart as, on turning over the leaves of the visitors' book at the hotel where they had arranged to pass the night, she read the name of Sir Philip Margrave in large, bold handwriting, that had been very familiar to her in the past.

"How strange that *he* should be staying here at the present moment," she reflected, wistfully. "Well, it does not matter much, since we leave by an early train in the morning, and I am not likely to encounter Sir Philip in the meantime."

But a most inconsistent longing to see her lover again crossed her mind at this moment, and spoilt all the beauty of the previous reflection.

Little did she dream under what strangely altered circumstances their next meeting would take place!

Very early the next morning, when the tired travellers were sleeping soundly, an alarm of fire echoed through the great hotel, while the bell that hung in the court-yard rang loudly.

A number of visitors were staying in the hotel at the time, and the scene of confusion that ensued can only be realized by those who have witnessed a similar disaster.

Archie Lawrence carried his wife downstairs in his arms, while Leah followed close behind them.

The fire had gained a terrible hold previous to its being discovered, and the smoke would have stupefied them had not the *pompiers* assisted them in gaining the open air. Some of the other inmates had contrived to escape from the burning building, but the majority were collected at the upper windows calling piteously for help.

"I must go back to fetch the boy; stay here till I return," the painter said, hurriedly, as he turned to depart; but a shrill scream from Margaret suddenly arrested him.

To his horror he beheld the nurse and child appear at a side-window, round which the flames were playing fiercely.

"Oh, Heaven! my boy, I must, I will save him!" he cried, frantically, as he rushed towards the principal entrance, now enveloped in flames. But strong hands held him back, and a voice said, authoritatively,—

"No one will be allowed to enter the burning building; all attempts at rescue must now be made from the outside. Courage, monsieur, your child will yet be saved. See, they have reached him; they are bringing him down. Heaven grant the ladder may hold firm for five minutes longer!"

Archie Lawrence could never clearly remember what happened next. He knew that at the end of a brief but awful period of suspense a ringing cheer rent the air; and his boy was placed all uninjured in his arms, while the terrified nurse stood sobbing beside him. But in that time of general confusion he could not immediately discover to whom he was indebted for the preservation of his child.

He stayed nearly all night at the scene of the conflagration, doing what he could to assist in rescuing others; and day was dawning when, smoke-begrimed and weary, he rejoined his party at the neighbouring hotel, to which they had been conveyed.

"I cannot leave Paris until I have seen and thanked the man who saved our boy, Maggie," he remarked, as they sat at breakfast some hours later on. "I must go out presently and make some inquiries about him; he may prove to be one of the firemen."

"Pardon, monsieur, but you are mistaken!" interposed the lively son of Gaul who was in attendance upon them. "It was an English gentleman named Sir Philip Margrave who rescued your little son and several grown persons from the burning building. He was staying at the hotel now destroyed, and they brought him here after he had received the injury. He fell in bringing the last one down, the flames were full in his face, and *le pauvre homme* for the time being has completely lost his sight."

"Well," remarked the painter, when they were once more alone, breaking in upon the silent ban of astonishment that had fallen upon them all, "I am grateful—very grateful to Sir Philip for having saved my child's life. At the same time, I would rather have been under an obligation to any other man living. I hope that his injuries—— Why, Leah, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

For Leah, her face buried in her hands, was sobbing violently.

"He has acted so nobly, so bravely," she said, brokenly, "and yet I sent him from me without one kind, hopeful word, believing him to be wholly bad because he had committed one wrong, revengeful deed. I was so young then, and I could not tell that unmixed good or evil are seldom to be met with in the world. Oh, Philip! poor Philip! and now you are blind and alone!"

Little by little the painter and his wife drew from her the story of her love for Philip Margrave, and the reason that had prompted her to refuse his offer of marriage. Then Archie Lawrence took several undecided turns up and down the room, finally coming to a standstill in front of Leah.

"If you can find it in your heart to forgive him and to become his wife do so by all means," he said, gravely and kindly. "He did me a cruel injury when he destroyed my picture, but the event of last night have dispelled any resentment previously cherished against him by Margaret or myself. Is it not so, little woman?"

"It is, indeed," Margaret replied, earnestly. "We can entertain no feeling save gratitude

towards Philip Margrave *now*, whatever his past or present faults may be. Leah, darling, put pride on one side and pay him a visit. He is alone, with only servants to care for him. Go to him, and when you have arrived at an understanding with each other Archie and I will thank him for saving our boy."

"I must go at once then, or I shall lose my courage," Leah said, as she rose from her seat with a look of wistful, yearning sorrow upon her lovely face. "I may meet with a repulse, for he was very angry when he left me, but for both our sakes I am willing to risk even that!"

Philip Margrave was leaning back in an easy chair, his injured eyes covered with a linen bandage, when Leah entered the private sitting-room that had been placed at his disposal by the manager of the hotel. He was feeling listless and weary, while the loss of his sight seemed more terrible to him than death itself.

He was not altogether a bad man. In spite of the revengeful bent of his disposition, he had plenty of personal courage; he could sympathize with any one in distress, and he held the strings of his ample purse with a loose hand.

Even his love of retaliation did not extend beyond the object of dislike, and he would have rescued Lawrence's child all the same had he been aware of its parentage. Fortunately, the heavy stage villain, without one redeeming point, is seldom to be met with in real life!

"Philip!" she said, gently, "they told me I might come if I did not say or do anything to excite you, and after what has happened I *could* not stay away from you any longer!"

At the sound of the well-remembered voice he started up from his reclining attitude, while an expression of wonder and delight crossed his lips.

"Leah, can it really be you?" he cried. "Are you come in answer to my thoughts? They were dwelling upon you even as you spoke."

"I was staying at the hotel that has been destroyed," she replied, as she drew yet nearer to him. "I only heard of your injury, and the brave conduct that all Paris is talking about just now."

"It has cost me my sight," he said, sadly. "I am well punished for my wrong-doings in the past. It is kind of you, though, to come and see one whom you so greatly despise!"

"You are mistaken, I do not despise you," she rejoined, almost humbly. "It is an unusual confession for a woman to make, but I am sorry that I ever sent you from me—that I ventured to judge you so harshly, Philip. Were you to put that question to me again you would meet with a very different answer."

"Had you but told me this yesterday I could have believed it," said Philip Margrave, "but not now. Pity for a blind and helpless man alone has induced you to revoke your previous decision respecting our marriage; and nothing less than love from you could ever satisfy me, Leah!"

"Yes, pity for myself, even more than for you, has brought me here to acquaint you with my changed opinion, my wider views," she replied, earnestly. "I have never known one happy hour since the day when I sent you from me. Oh, Philip, I am speaking the truth, I am, indeed."

"My darling, I cannot help believing you," he said, thankfully, a look of intense joy lighting up his pale, wan face as he spoke. "Your words carry conviction with them. Like an angel of mercy you have brightened the darkest hour that it was ever my lot to spend. But ought I to allow you to sacrifice your fresh young life to such a useless, helpless log as myself? The doctors say that it may be years before I regain my sight."

"And till that time comes it will be my dearest privilege to care for you, and to anticipate all your wants," replied Leah brightly. "Philip, my stage life is over. I shall write to papa Ashmead, and inform him that I have entered into an engagement of a domestic and matrimonial nature. Have you any other 'just cause or impediment' to bring forward against our marriage?"

"What will Lawrence say when he hears of it?" inquired Philip, doubtfully. "I cannot in reason expect him to feel friendly towards me."

"Not when you saved the life of his darling boy last night?" said Leah, quietly. "Lawrence and Margaret are both below, ready to forget the past, and to regard you only as the preserver of their child."

Apparently she got the best of the argument, for a quiet wedding took place next day at the British Embassy, the blind bridegroom being led forward by Archie Lawrence, who also gave the bride away. Then Sir Philip and Lady Margrave returned to England, while the other members of the party, minus one of their number, resumed their interrupted journey to the sunny south.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

SATISFACTORILY EXPLAINED AT LAST.—It is said that, when garments were first doled out, man gave woman the petticoats. He did it to prevent her running after him in all his pleasures and pursuits. He saw that if she once got rid of that garment she would be his equal.

THE Rochester *Post Express* having been asked whether it is the correct thing to hold a bird in your fingers while eating it, replies: "If the bird is the regulation watering-place spring chicken, it is correct enough, but poor policy. You should brace yourself against something, and use both hands."

LADY GARDENING.—Make your beds early in the morning; sew buttons on your husband's shirt; do not rake up any grievances; protect the young and tender branches of your family; plant a smile of good temper on your face; and carefully root out all angry feelings, and expect a good crop of happiness.

A COUNTRY editor undertook to ride with a pass belonging to one of his subscribers who had an advertisement in his paper. After examining it, the guard looked at it and the editor, and said: "This pass is crooked." "Not at all," said the editor, blandly. "But I say it is." "That's just where you are fooling yourself; it's me that's crooked. The pass is all right enough."

A YOUNG man dressed in the height of fashion and with a poetic turn of mind was driving along a country road, and, upon gazing at a pond which skirted the highway, said, "Oh, how I would like to lave my heated head in those cooling waters!" An Irishman, overhearing the exclamation, remarked, "Bedad, you might lave it there and it wouldn't sink!"

THE late Mr. Alexander, the eminent architect, was under cross-examination at Maidstone by Serjeant (afterward Baron) Garrow, who wished to detract from the weight of his testimony, and after asking him what was his name, he proceeded: "You are a builder?" "No, sir, I am an architect." "They are much the same." "I beg your pardon, sir; I cannot admit that. I consider them to be totally different." "Oh, indeed! Perhaps you will state wherein the difference consists?" "An architect, sir, conceives the design, prepares the plan, draws out the specifications—in short, supplies the mind; the builder is merely the bricklayer or the carpenter. The builder is the machine; the architect the power that puts it together and sets it going." "Oh, very well, Mr. Architect, that will do. And now, after your very ingenious distinction without a difference, perhaps you can inform the Court who was the architect of the Tower of Babel?" The reply, for promptness and wit, is not to be rivalled in the history of rejoinder: "There was no architect, sir, and hence the confusion."

"YE pays no more attention to me," said Patrick to his children, "than if I were a dumb baste talking to yez."

A ROAD mother, in excusing her daughter for marrying a negro, said, "Poor, dear thing, she has been colour-blind for nearly a year."

THERE are two million widows in Germany it is said. Some of the husbands are in heaven, but the majority are in America.

Two rural dames were standing before a copy of Paul Potter's masterpiece at one of the local galleries. One of them found the right number in the catalogue, and read: "'The Young Bull, after Potter.'" "There's the bull," said the other, "but where is Potter?" "Oh, that must be him behind the tree!" answered the other, pointing to the figure of the herdsman.

THE Empress Eugénie is credited with saying a saucy thing to Plon-Plon, the unlucky prince who not long ago published a manifesto in Paris. On his return from Corsica, where he had delivered an imprudent speech, he said to the Empress, "Fair cousin, I bring you my head." "Do you want me to put brains into it?" said Eugénie, in reply. Whereupon the prince made his bow, retired, resigned all his employments, and ordered his yacht to be put in sailing order.

"Look out!" exclaimed a man over whose face a barber was moving a razor; "you are cutting my moustache." "You didn't tell me not to cut it," the barber replied. "With me a man must always specify." "All right," said the customer. When the barber had finished, the man arose from the chair, approached the artist, and gave him a violent kick. "Look out; you are kicking me!" howled the barber. "You didn't tell me not to kick you. With me a man must always specify."

WEATHER PROPHETS.—Moore, the almanac maker, met an old shepherd, and asked him what he thought of the weather, as he had a long journey before him. The shepherd said he believed it would turn out a rainy day, although it was then very fine. The rider went on his way, and was well drenched with rain before his journey's end. On his return he saw the same shepherd, and said to him, "Well, you were right. You must have some valuable rules for the weather. I'll give you a guinea if you will tell it me." "I will," said the shepherd. The guinea was handed to him at once, and he said, "Why, sir, I take 'Moore's Almanac,' and he said it would be a fine day. Now I always find the contrary to what he says is right; so I knew it would rain."

WHAT COULD HE EXPECT?—Many are the stories told of the alarm caused by the descents of balloons in the early days of those perilous adventures in the air with which the public are now so familiar. Coxwell tells a story of descending near a village late at night, and being absolutely denied shelter or refreshment at several houses, two of them inns, he had to sleep in the car, with ballast-bags for pillows, and curtains—silk curtains—formed by the folds of the balloon in the middle of the field. The next morning some workmen approached and he lay still purposely to see how they would behave. On jumping up like jack-in-the-box, these worthies looked perfectly bewildered. Two ran off, and the rest were powerless as to speech. "Why, lads, it's a balloon!" said Coxwell. "Do not be frightened." "And what be you?" inquired the bravest of the lot. "Why, the aeronaut, to be sure—the party who goes up." "Ah, said the rustic, "I thought you wa'n't a mortal man." "But I am though; feel me," said Coxwell. "No, danged if I come any closer!" and immediately a side movement was made for the gate. The landlords who had denied him the night before apologized; but one of them said, "Lor' love ye, sir, a man coming out of the cloud, what could he expect on this here wicked earth?"

SOCIETY.

The Duchess of Connaught, when starting with the Duke from Charing Cross for India, travelled in a simple black dress, with a round black hat trimmed with scarlet. The Duchess of Edinburgh wore a handsome cloak of black and gold. The Duchess of Albany was in black, and Princess Christian in velvet and fur.

Splendid sport attended the opening of the hunting season in Leicestershire, the famous Quorn pack carrying off the palm with a grand run of over an hour and a quarter. Mr. Coupland, the master, was welcomed by a brilliant assemblage of about 300 ladies and gentlemen. There was a large number of ladies mounted.

The marriage of Mr. Maurice Gubbay, only child of Mr. Gubbay, of Calcutta, with Miss Luna Sassoon, second daughter of Mr. Reuben D. Sassoon, took place at the family residence in Belgrave-square. A large party of relatives and intimate friends met in the principal drawing-room at one o'clock, the hour appointed for the ceremony, and shortly shortly afterwards proceeded to the blue drawing-room, in which the nuptial canopy of red velvet, fringed with gold, had been erected. The bridegroom was attended by Mr. Edward Sassoon as best man, and the bride by her three young sisters as bridesmaids. The bride wore a trained dress of the richest white satin, the front of which was trimmed with exquisite Brussels lace and garlands of orange blossoms; a wreath of the same flowers and a tulle veil, which was kept in its place by a diamond star. She wore a splendid diamond necklace (two rows of large stones), the gift of the bridegroom's father, fine diamond earrings, the bridegroom's gift, and carried a beautiful bouquet.

The marriage of Mr. Arthur Colville (Rifle Brigade), only son of Colonel the Hon. W. J. Colville, Controller of the Duke of Edinburgh's household, with Miss Olivia Spencer-Churchill, took place at All Saints' Church, Eaniamore Gardens, on the 6th November. The bride, who was conducted to the altar by her father (who afterwards gave her away), was met, as she entered the church, by eight bridesmaids. She was dressed in white duchesse satin, made with a long train, and trimmed with Brussels lace and orange flowers, and a Brussels lace veil was fastened to her hair by a diamond star, the gift of the Hon. Mrs. Colville. Her jewels included a valuable diamond and ruby bangle, presented to her by T.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh; diamond and pearl bracelet, the gift of Lord Calthorpe; gold bracelet, with diamond and pearl horse shoe, the gift of her mother; and diamond and sapphire bee brooch.

The bridesmaids' dresses were extremely pretty. The four elder ladies wore skirts of white brocaded satin, with bodice and drapery of satin duchesse, coronets of white heather, and tulle veils; and the four younger were dressed in white muslin and lace frocks over white satin, broad white satin sashes, wreaths, and veils. Each wore a jewelled horseshoe pin and carried a bouquet of white flowers, both gifts of the bridegroom.

Prince Leopold of Anhalt, the bridegroom elect of the Princess Victoria, second daughter of the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany, descends from Albert the Bear, and, less remotely, from that "old Dessauer" with whom readers of Carlyle's Frederick are well acquainted. The Duchy over which Prince Leopold will one day be called to reign is rather bigger than Warwickshire, with a population of nearly a quarter of a million. The Duke's Civil List is fixed at £29,000; but this sum represents a small portion of his wealth, the family having private estates in Saxony, East Prussia, and the Crimea, embracing in all an area of more than 200 square miles.

STATISTICS.

The Mineral Waters of France.—A recent report shows how rich France is in mineral waters and baths, the total number being 1,027, of which 641 are thermal. The departments which possess these attractions are 63, although the various sources of the waters are irregularly bestowed, both as to number of springs and the quantity of water that they yield. The richest department in this direction is Puy-de-Dôme, which has 94 springs, followed by Ardèche with 77, Vosges with 76, Ariége and Pyrénées Orientales with 69 each, Hautes-Pyrénées 64, Loir 38, Cantal 34, Haute Garonne 31, Allier 27, and Aveyron 26.

Imports of Fuel in France.—The import of fuel into France in 1881 was 10,221,000 tons, of which 5,366,000 came from Belgium, 3,560,400 from England, and 1,225,000 from Germany. Coal importation has been steadily increasing for several years in France, and that of 1871 being only 7,709,000. The exports of coal are very small and are as steadily decreasing, having been 603,000 tons in 1880, and 601,000 in 1881. The peat fuel industry is also on the decrease, for in 1872 the working of peat bogs amounted to 325,000 tons and in 1881 to but 233,000. The peat is, however, still largely used there being upwards of 1,078 recognized peat-beds in the State, on which are 8,490 separate working, employing 26,000 hands.

GEMS.

Being observed, where observation is not sympathy, is just being tortured.

I would rather join in the dim joy of superstition than in air rarefied to nothing by the air-pump of unbelief.

Do not be afraid of wild boys and girls; they often grow up to be the very best men and women. Wildness is not viciousness.

The law of harvest is to reap more than you sow. Sow and act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny.

A man or woman may be highly irritable, and yet be sweet, tender, gentle, loving, sociable, genial, kind, charitable, thoughtful for others, unselfish, generous.

Health is the bed-plate on which the whole mental machinery may rest and work. If this be displaced or cracked, all the mechanism that stands on it will be jarred and disturbed, and made ineffected.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

Chocolate Caramels.—One-half pound of grated chocolate, two teacups of sugar, one-half cup of milk and water, a lump of butter, one teaspoonful of alum.

Cookies.—One cup of sugar, one half cup of lard or butter, one-half cup of sour milk, one-half teaspoonful of soda, just flour enough to roll, baking quickly. Add any flavouring you wish. No eggs are required. These are very nice if grated or prepared cocoanut is added.

Delicious Pudding.—One quart of boiled milk, mixed with a quarter of a pound of mashed potatoes and the same quantity of flour, with one or two ounces of butter, and two ounces of sugar. When it is cold, add three eggs well beaten; bake half-an-hour, and eat with wine sauce.

Sponge Cake.—Take three eggs, beat three minutes; then add one and one-half cups of sugar, and beat five minutes; add one teacup of flour and one teaspoonful of cream tartar, and beat three minutes; add one-half teaspoonful of soda, dissolved in one half cup of cold water, and another cup of flour; beat enough to mix well.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Another interesting addition to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington has just been opened to the public—two galleries, containing collections of the shells and various marine animals of the globe, most carefully classified.

The Art Treasures lately found in the garret of the Antwerp public institutions are being cleaned, and will shortly be shown in the chapel of the former Orphanage, Rue de l'Hôpital. Many are most precious works by Rubens, Holbein, Van Dyck, and other great Flemish old masters.

Luther's wedding and betrothal rings have been counterfeited by dozens in Germany, industrious relic-vendors having hunted up the sham rings made for the two previous Luther commemorations. The originals, however, are in the library at Helmstedt, in the Harz Mountains, where they were placed by Duke Rudolph of Brunswick.

A genuine flying machine was tried recently by an English inventor, but turned out a failure. When the gentleman started, his huge satin wings, worked by a powerful lever set in motion by a miniature steam-engine, certainly took him along at a smart pace, but unfortunately they propelled him forwards, and not upwards. Thus, as he was being carried towards a considerable stream of water, his friends were obliged to run after him and stop the engine to save his life.

The Co-Operative Store movement lately instituted by a large number of German officers has aroused great indignation and alarm amongst Teutonic tradesmen and manufacturers. In many towns the Chambers of Commerce energetically denounce the scheme, while the officers are just as zealous in promoting a movement which shall enable all the military to procure necessary articles of consumption at lower prices. Some even talk of coming to England to study the system of management.

The Kitchen.—No lady of the highest talent or accomplishment need feel that she demeans herself by giving her most earnest attention to the beauty and comfort of her home, and the most careful ordering of everything connected with the kitchen department. Low down as foolish ideas of gentility have been accustomed to place that department, it has much more to do with the comfort or discomfort, the peace and happiness or the discord and evil temper of the whole family than can be gained from elegant or fashionable parties and all that etiquette demands in fashionable life.

Petticoat Rule.—A woman who obeys her husband in all proper things is at least graceful and pleasing, but a man "under his wife's thumb" is one of the most contemptible spectacles in existence. It would be better for any woman to have her every action dictated by a sensible man than to be the wife of a mean-souled little creature subservient to her will. Should she contrive to rule her husband, to be the better of the two openly and in the estimation of all observers, she would only bring contempt upon him, without winning any sensible person's respect for herself.

A Criminal Museum.—A strange museum not unlike that private collection existing in the Rogues' gallery, is in the possession of the officers of police at Paris. It consists of all sorts of implements used in committing crimes, such as revolvers, bullets, daggers, knives, ropes, cudgels, and many other articles for which it would be difficult to imagine the use, if M. Mace, the exhibitor, did not obligingly explain when and for what purpose they had been employed. Among other things there is a collection of keys, each forming a letter of the alphabet, which have served a band of burglars in opening locks of every description. The museum also contains a number of photographs of well-known criminals and representations of scenes of assassination.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANNA BOLENA.—Mozart and Beethoven stand at the head of composers of classical music.

LEILA G.—A pretty intelligent face; hair bright brown. Writing very legible.

S. V. P.—The 21st of February, 1883, fell upon Saturday.

WEEKLY READER.—If the lady obtained a divorce her husband would have to pay the costs.

AURORA.—Good writing, but a little too straggling for business.

EVELYN AND MAUD.—We do not insert matrimonial advertisements, so regret we cannot oblige you.

NAMELESS.—We have no recollection of the paragraph in question. It probably appeared in some other journal.

EDITH.—You are quite right in your calculation. It is no trouble, but a pleasure to answer our correspondents' questions to the best of our ability.

TOBY.—1. Eleanor means "alluring," Bessie, the "oath of God;" Josephine, the "feminine of Joseph." 2. Exercise and regular living. 3. Fair writing.

C. M. S.—Those are the cheapest editions we are acquainted with. The only abstract ideas on such subjects are to be found in works on mental science.

DUPE.—If the business was the woman's own she has a perfect right to sell it; and in any case she can compel her husband to support her.

C. M. B.—Wordsworth wrote the "Excursion," which is a fine poem, though Byron, who was prejudiced in the matter, said it was "frowsy and his aversion."

BERLINER.—Lord Chancellor Selborne was born on the 27th of November, 1812, and will therefore attain his seventy-first birthday this year.

SMOKER.—In 1880 over 43,241,000lbs of tobacco, or 1·42lbs. per head of the population, were consumed in the United Kingdom.

L. S. D.—Study the laws of versification, and read attentively the works of the best poets both in English and in any other language you happen to know.

G. V. D.—There is no such ceremony to be gone through. The fellow is only laughing at you. Have nothing to say to him.

J. W. D.—If the lady chooses to return presents, the gentleman is quite entitled to take them back; but he should at the same time return all the presents he has received from her.

LILY S.—Perhaps the young fellow is a little ashamed of himself for not having made the appointment; perhaps he is bashful, and only wants a little encouragement. There is nothing to pay.

D. B. S.—You ought not to have been so hasty to make promises without calculating whether you would be able to perform them or not. You cannot in honour back out of your present position.

G. C. M.—Much depends upon the constitution, but it is decidedly too young to commence; wait at least another couple of years, and then indulge only moderately.

D. B. W.—If you do not care for the young man, except as a friend, it is wrong to engage yourself to him, especially as you are so young. Why not wait a year or so?

ALBINIA.—Nova Scotia is the most easterly province of the dominion of Canada. Halifax, with a population of over 36,000, is the capital. It has a magnificent harbour, and is the principal naval station of North America.

AARON G. B.—No doubt the lady believed your protestations to be in earnest, and received your intentions in good part. If you have made her care for you, you have acted in a mean and cowardly manner, and deserve a sound thrashing.

S. R. R.—1. We do not approve of the custom some writers have of interlarding their work with scraps of foreign languages. It generally betrays ignorance or poverty of expression. 2. *Che sara Sara* is Italian, and means "What is to be will be."

INQUISITIVE.—There is no such church. One of the parties must have resided fifteen days in the parish in which the ceremony is to be performed. If married in church it can only be either by banns or licence; but two persons can be legally married before a registrar of marriages without any religious ceremony whatever.

P. V.—1. We know of no remedy for redness of the face. As you grow older you will probably regret losing the colour which now seems to annoy you so much. 2. Castor oil and brandy will help the hair. The proportions are three ounces of oil and one ounce of brandy. Certainly. 3. It would be your duty to acknowledge its receipt.

LONELY ONE.—1. There is no reason, providing the young people are fond of each other, why the marriage of first cousins should not be as happy as other marriages. 2. Certainly not too old. Practise four hours a day earnestly. 3. Writing fair, but too scratchy. 4. See answer to "P. V." in this number. 5. You might pick up a decent instrument second-hand suitable for your purpose for ten pounds, or even less; but you should have some one with you who has some knowledge of such things.

NEXT WEEK,

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RENUNCIATION.

Will you play me the songs that you played long ago,
When beside us were others, who listened and dreamed,
While the summer night sank, as a soul sinks with woe,
And as tears, the pale stars in her drapery gleamed?

No less fair the hour present than hours past and gone,
For the silence is sacred, the wind-gushes balm,
And the moon, like a golden rose blooming floats on
Through the gardens of God, and their infinite calm.

And the windows to welcome the glory are wide,
And the room is a temple of perfume and peace:
And my once aching heart, thro' its loss purified,
Seems a hush of content which shall never more cease.

Very strong—having put away all that is vain—
I may listen and marvel the tune is so pure;
Very quiet at last, having measured great pain,
I may follow each delicate fanciful lure.

All the feverish dreams of a desperate soul
Are renounced—all the passionate pride of my youth,
All the aims and desires that long baffled control—
Deep deceits and slow snares bearing semblance of truth.

And the tender old songs with a quaint burthen filled,
Will awaken no flush of disquiet in me:
For my soul is enlightened, and strengthened, and stilled
By the love that has been, and the peace that shall be!

LILY M.

S. N.—1. We know of nothing better than glycerine and lemon juice to whiten and soften the hands and prevent them from chapping. 2. Yellow dock root and sarsaparilla will purify the blood, and help you to get rid of pimples, blotches, etc.

WINNIE.—1. Rusty nail water will sometimes remove freckles. 2. Prepared chalk makes a fine dentifrice, and is not at all injurious. The orris root is added to impart to it an agreeable odour. 4. A little castor oil and brandy rubbed into the eyebrows occasionally will darken them, and perhaps promote their growth.

A. S. P.—1. It would not be necessary to thank the gentleman specially; your acceptance of his hospitality would show that his attentions, to that extent, were agreeable to you; but it would be perfectly proper to acknowledge, in a general way, his courtesy to you. 2. There would be no impropriety in asking him to call again.

JESSIE F.—1. Efforts have been made at different times to identify Junius with Serjeant James Adair, Colonel Isaac Barre, Hugh Macaulay Boyd, Edmund Burke, Bishop John Butler, Lord Camden, Lord Chatham, Lord Chesterfield, John Dunning (Lord Ashburton), Sir Philip Francis, Edward Gibbon, Henry Grattan, Sir William Jones, John Horne Tooke, Horace Walpole, Lord George Sackville, John Wilkes, and many others, but the authorship in question has been more generally ascribed to Sir Philip Francis than to any other. According to Macaulay, "the case against Francis, or, if you please, in favour of Francis rests on coincidences sufficient to convict a murderer."

EDITH.—One way to ascertain is to advertise in the daily papers; another is to make application in person at any shop in your vicinity.

CARRIE.—There are professors who prepare young ladies for the stage, but their precise terms we are unable to state. An advertisement in one of the theatrical papers would probably elicit all the information you desire on the subject.

L. M. S.—1. A pair of gloves would be an appropriate present. 2. The lock of hair referred to failed to reach us. You probably forgot to enclose it. 3. If agreeable to the gentleman, there would be no impropriety in inviting your lady friend to accompany you. Indeed you could not very well go without her, if she were a special visitor. 4. You can return home any time after the refreshments have been served.

A. J. O.—1. Attend a gymnasium and you will soon learn. 2. Cold water applications may help you. 3. Indian corn abounds in starch and has a fair amount of nutritive matter. Rice has considerable starch and is very wholesome. Peas, beans, and potatoes have all more or less starch, and the second named are particularly nutritive. Some puddings are wholesome and nutritive, such as rice, tapioca, corn-starch, Indian, sago, etc., if not made too sweet.

S. W. B.—The lines referred to occur in the tragedy of *Ion*, by Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd. They read as follows:—

"So his life has flowed
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
Alone are mirror'd; which, though shapes of ill
May hover round its surface, glides in light,
And takes no shadow from them."

L. A. R.—See reply to Winnie. The young ladies generally have to give some time for nothing, and in some cases to pay a premium, but it is all a matter of arrangement between the parties. You write a very good hand, but it would look better if a little larger and there were more space between the lines. A good pen and good black ink make a vast difference in the appearance of writing.

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